

*Old
Tartar Trails*



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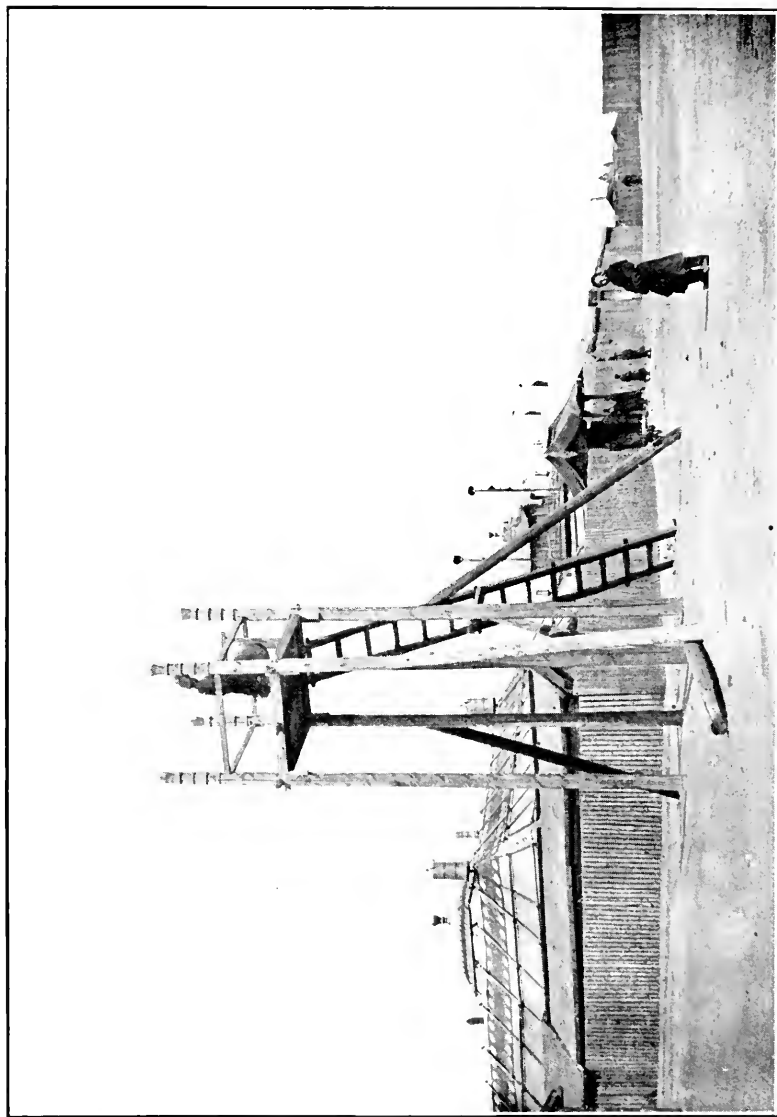
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OLD TARTAR TRAILS







Frontispiece (page 32)

Calling the Faithful to Prayer

OLD TARTAR TRAILS

BY

A. S. KENT

*Illustrated with Photographs
taken by the Author*

SHANGHAI

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CONTENTS

| | PAGE |
|---|------|
| THE CALL OF TARTARY | 1 |
| THE JOURNEY TO MONGOLIA | 11 |
| KIACHTA AND THE URGА TRAIL | 23 |
| MONGOL MANNERS AND WAYS | 34 |
| MEMORIES OF URGА | 48 |
| OFF FOR THE WEST | 64 |
| THROUGH THE KARAKORUM COUNTRY | 76 |
| SAINSHABI TO ULIASSUTAI | 88 |
| PONY POST TO KOBDO | 106 |
| BY TELEGA TO THE BORDER | 120 |
| THROUGH THE SIBERIAN ALTAI | 126 |
| ASPECT OF TRADE | 140 |

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

| | PAGE |
|--|------|
| Bivouac in the Desert | 68 |
| Buddha at the Feast of Maitreya | 53 |
| Buriat with his Cart crossing the Frozen Selenga | 18 |
| Calling the Faithful to Prayer (Frontispiece) | 52 |
| Camel Caravan | 110 |
| Caravan en route to Uliassutai | 94 |
| Crossing the Telgol | 114 |
| Dug-outs used for crossing River Kobdo | 116 |
| Headdress of Mongol Women | 36 |
| Horse towing dug-out ferry across the River Kobdo | 116 |
| Karakorum Golgotha | 84 |
| Kobdo—a Poplar Grove | 120 |
| Kobdo—sacked by the Mongols in 1912 | 116 |
| Lama Tomb | 78 |
| Lama Tombs containing the Ashes of Saints | 64 |
| Living Tomb in which the Mongol Lawbreaker is immured | 56 |
| Mongol Headdress is no handicap to Horsemanship | 36 |
| Mongol Princes who attended the Feast of Maitreya | 52 |
| Mongol Soldiers at the Feast of Maitreya | 54 |
| Mongol Yurt | 68 |
| Prison House at Urga | 56 |
| Relay Station in the Desert between Uliassutai and Kobdo | 110 |
| Religious Ceremony of the Lamas—burning a Sin | 53 |
| Sainshabi Lamasery and Trade Mart | 86 |
| Saithurae Lamasery and Trade Mart | 86 |
| Selinginsk, in the Trans-Baikal Region | 20 |
| Siberian Altai—the Katuna Glacier | 131 |
| Siberian Posting Station at Selinginsk | 20 |
| Stones with Sacred Inscriptions and Prayer Wheels near Urga | 46 |
| Temple of the Third Living Buddha | 34 |
| Tibetan Yak | 90 |
| Travelling Tent of a Wealthy Mongol Pilgrim | 96 |
| Uliassutai—the One and Only Street | 104 |
| Verkne-Udinsk, the starting point for Selinginsk and Kiachta | 16 |
| Well in the Desert of Mongolia | 96 |
| Zagan Baishin—ruins of Walled City | 78 |

CHAPTER I.

THE CALL OF TARTARY.

The irresistible hold which Tartar lands and Tartar peoples gain upon the imaginations of all Occidentals who come to acquire even a slight knowledge of the modern Tartar or his ancient history is difficult to explain to those who have always associated the very name Tartar with hideous cruelty; yet it is real, powerful and lasting, as many who live in the East can testify. It takes men, whom no one would mistake for adventurers, into wastes and wildernesses to which no bribe would tempt them, and journeys in Tartary, hard, comfortless and unprofitable as they are, breed a love of the people, the wind-beaten steppes and desert ranges, which time does not eradicate, but tempers into a wistful longing for further wanderings and the renewal of old Tartar acquaintances.

The journey through Mongolia, which the following chapters of this book describe in some detail, was prompted by the irresistible fascination which glimpses of the rough country beyond the Great Wall of China, the sight of a few Mongol horsemen and caravans of camels from Outer Mongolia, the accounts which friends gave me of the great free country to the north and a casual acquaintance with the history of the Mongol peoples, exercised upon me.

During a few years residence in China I occasionally visited Peking and Kalgan, the gate in the Great Wall through which passes China's most travelled highway into the land of the nomads. With every visit I saw the inhabitants of the grassland and desert coming and going, and I took a keener interest in the uncouth people whose fathers built the greatest empire that Asia has ever known, and who are cousins

to all the hordes that have swept Europe and Asia from the time of Herodotus to the coming of the Turks.

When I was in Kalgan I never failed to ride out of the Great Gate—the Kalga, from which the place takes its name—to watch the caravans and the little groups of horsemen filing down the rocky pass or striking out into the wilderness after a brief sojourn among the Chinese, and to clothe them with some of the majesty of their history and tradition. The seeming confusion and chaos about the camel camps of new arrivals, the struggles of entangled beasts, the oaths and imprecations that were hurled at unhappy animals, the guttural conversations all about me, the feverish repairs upon saddles and camel carts and the occasional exhibits of masterful horsemanship, all served to feed my imagination and fire me to a pitch of interest which made the thought of a journey through the land from which all the Tartar races have moved in their locust-like migrations, an overwhelming desire. When I was last at Kalgan and about to return to Europe, an opportunity presented itself which enabled me to realize my long cherished hopes of travelling among the Mongols, and I thereupon settled down to a business-like consideration of routes and equipment, which put me very shortly upon the long trail.

It may still puzzle some readers to know why I entered with such enthusiasm upon a long journey through a notoriously arid, fruitless and thinly populated country, and why I write with no little zest in the following chapters of my experiences among a people palpably ignorant, uncouth and squalid. In attempting to explain, one must first appeal to the people who know something of the picturesqueness of nomadic tribes in other lands and of grazing countries the world over. In spite of their very apparent ugliness, such lands and such peoples have a charm which one must have felt to understand, and which no amount of description will adequately convey. Mongolia has this charm; it is the same charm that draws us irresistibly to the wandering tribes of Africa and Arabia: but it has, in addition, a setting of history and tradition, majestic,

horrible, or tragic, according to the angle of one's vision, which no other land of tents and cattle can rival, and certainly this history, constantly in the back of the traveller's mind, throws colour upon scores of places and people in Tartary, otherwise sordid and commonplace.

The forests and steppes of north-eastern Asia, from the ice belt of Siberia down to the Great Wall of China, have given space, grazing, and meat for the incubation of every Tartar horde that has worried Asia and the West. Here each successive tribe rose in power, wealth and intelligence, conquered and subdued its neighbours, felt its growing strength and its growing numbers in a poor land, and finally burst like a flood upon the South and West, carrying its heroes into the cities and palaces of the oldest of the most cultured peoples, where they ruled for a time with barbaric splendour and then sank, sated and degenerate with luxury, back into the squalor and primitiveness of their nomad fathers. The records of these movements in China are very old, and, according to the Chinese, they all came out of one breeding ground—Mongolia—and all had the traits and manners of the Mongols. From the Greek of Herodotus and the Hebrew of chance passages in the Old Testament we get references to the habits and ways of the fierce horsemen of the plains. They came into contact with Europe as the Scythians, the Huns, the Finns, the Turks and the Mongols, and nothing ever gained a decisive victory over them but ease and peace. Byzantium, Rome, Prussia, France, Russia, Arabia, Persia, India and China, have all known the Tartar horror and have suffered inordinately. Clans and tribes which never reached Europe exhausted their vitality eating up the riches of the Chinese Empire. The Turkish Ouigurs, for instance, and the Tungus peoples, the Juchens and the Manchus have all raised kingdoms on China's soil and have become extinct through excessive ease and opulence.

But no people, of all the Tartar family, made a more brilliant or more terrible place for themselves in history than

the Mongols, and of all the Empires of the East, the Empire of Mongolia, short-lived as it was, was unrivalled in its magnitude and power. It was a cowherd's kingdom founded upon the fragments of a scattered and disheartened tribe, which were whipped into shape by one man, who was well past middle age before he was assured of his supremacy among his own clansmen, and who thereafter devoted the few remaining years of his life to conquering all Asia from the Pacific to the Mediterranean, and establishing absolute rule over that vast area. Ghengiz Khan's military achievements seem now more like evil dreams than historical events, and his figure, tremendously majestic for the Mongols, but satanic and horrible according to our standards, takes on something more than human proportions in tradition and story. Wherever one rides in Mongolia to-day one feels that the yak-tail standards of Ghengiz have gone before, and it takes a very little effort of the imagination to convert one's Mongol guides and friends into the lancers and bowmen that their fathers were, when they rode to Poland or Syria at the great Khan's call.

The original Mongols were not the people of all Mongolia, but the members of a little tribe, of no great standing, which camped in the neighbourhood of the Kerulon River, not far East from the present town of Urga, where in the course of their expansion they had many masters. The Chinese mention them first in the T'ang Dynasty, and later they were known to be a people subject first to the Juchen and then to the Khitan. The name Mongol, which Chinese believe meant "brave," first came into the annals as Meng'u, and then in the time of Ghengiz Khan's great-grandfather Kabul, as Meng'ku, which is still the Chinese for the whole of Mongolia and for its people. It was this Kabul who first won dependencies for his tribe. As a shepherd chieftain he carried on energetic raids against his neighbours and was acknowledged by all the ruler of a free people. His grandson Yessugai expanded the boundaries of the tribal grazing ground a little

and won numerous victories in skirmishes with other Tartars. After one of these he returned to his camp to find that his wife had given birth to a son and as he had just killed a chief in battle he named the child after the dead warrior, calling him Temujin. For fifty-two years Temujin was the name of Ghengiz Khan. Yessugai died when the boy was 13 years old. The tribe scattered and old enemies boldly made inroads upon the tribal grazing. The family of the future conqueror, with a handful of retainers, spent many years in winning back what had been lost in a month or so, and for whole seasons the future Ghengiz learned the rudiments of tactics, creeping about in forests and mountains avoiding his enemies. But in time he had a tribal following again. Old friends of his father among the Keraites helped him, and he made inroads upon his neighbours in the most approved Tartar style. Then his expansion began. He crushed his enemies from the border of China to the Baikal, then crushed his treacherous friends, and having established his authority among the Mongols and kindred tribes, set out to the west and south-west to make raids upon the Naiman Turks and the Kansu Chinese, then the people of Tangut. It was in Tangut, about 1189, that the Mongols created him their great Khan and gave him the title of Ghengiz, the Invincible. Titles and honours seemed to have lighted his ambition, for it was only then, after forty years of mediocre tribal warfare, that he became a conqueror on an ambitious scale, and aspired to conquer the world.

Turning his attention to Turkestan, Khorassan, Bokhara, Armenia, and southern Russia, he conquered the peoples of those countries and set new boundaries to his kingdom, thereby laying the foundations of one of the mightiest Empires in the history of mankind. His death occurred in 1227, when he was succeeded by Ogdai, who, following in the triumphal wake of his illustrious predecessor, completed the conquest of the Turkish hordes and Turkestan, annexed a great part of China, advanced westward, and besieged Tiflis.

Under the command of Batu, a nephew of Ogdai, the Mongol banners were carried into Europe, where, after successive triumphs of military skill and leadership, he succeeded in taking Moscow, and then turned southward to Hungary, finally taking Pesth in 1241, from which place he was recalled on the death of his uncle.

Internal disturbances arose in consequence of the death of Ogdai, and it was not until 1251 that Mangu was proclaimed Emperor. It was about this time that the first European mission headed by William de Rubruquis, a minor friar, visited his court at Karakorum, the splendour and magnificence of which have been so admirably described by that intrepid traveller, Marco Polo, who has left us in his writings an imperishable record of his journeys while in the service of the illustrious Khubla Khan.

Mangu crossed into Thibet and Indo-China, and his brother invaded Mesopotamia and Syria, adding territory to the rapidly increasing Empire and fresh lustre to the feats of Mongol arms. The zenith of Mongol power was attained in the reign of Khubla Khan. He overthrew the Sung Dynasty and set up that of the Mongols in its place. His Empire extended from the Dnieper to the Sea of Japan and from Siberia to the Malay Peninsula.

In 1355 there appeared a man who was destined to destroy Mongol rule in China, in the person of Chu Yuan-chang, a Buddhist priest, who, casting aside his habit, assumed the garb of a warrior. At this time China was convulsed with internal strife and Mongol power was on the wane, owing to the dissensions among the leaders. In this, Chu Yuan-chang saw his opportunity, and, notwithstanding the many difficulties to overcome, steadily persevered with the task of winning adherents to his side. After thirteen years' persistent effort, he collected an army strong enough to enable him to march against the weakening Mongol forces, and after a series of brilliant victories finally defeated the Mongol leaders and proclaimed himself Emperor at Nanking in February, 1368.

This was the beginning of the Ming Dynasty. In August of the same year he crossed the Yellow River with his army and marched on to the capital, all cities submitting to him without opposition. Not content with this, he set himself the task of driving the remaining Mongol forces from the Empire, which he ultimately accomplished. With the defeat of Ussukpal, the last great Khan who was slain in battle, the Mongol armies were destroyed and Mongol power in China was completely broken.

During two centuries Mongol princes strove to regain their lost dominions; but without success. About the middle of the 17th century the Mongols were divided into groups under chieftains. The Khalkhas were in the north, the Eleuths in the west and Chakhars and Ordos occupied the country between the Great Wall and the Gobi. From this point onwards the history of Mongolia is merged into that of China, and it is not until the events of 1911, culminating in the revolution and complete overthrow of the Manchu Dynasty, that any particular features of interest present themselves.

For their decline, the Mongols have to thank their own Tartar temperament which does not permit them to live in civilization and retain their vigour. Transplanted in more fertile and cheerful surroundings than their native wilderness, they gorge and idle, weaken through indulgence, and finally fall an easy prey to the first people who covet their power or property. For their continuance in a state of dependence, ignorance and poverty, they are indebted to Lamaism, a form of Buddhism imported from Thibet, which has proved to be a strangling incubus wherever it has gained a footing.

The old Mongol Khans were religious liberals who encouraged the preaching of all the doctrines of their era at their Court and who took great delight in arranging debates among the rival propagandists of a dozen faiths. Moslems, Nestorian Christians, Roman Catholics, Thibetan Buddhists, Chinese Buddhists, Hindus, Taoists, sun worshippers, fire worshippers, magicians, and priests of the old Black Faith,

were all welcome, and among the families and military staffs of the Khans, both men and women chose whatever appealed most to their reason or fancy from among the various creeds offered, and followed them with perfect liberty. Ghengiz once favoured the Taoists and at a later date Kublai showed some honour to the Buddhists; but during the period of the Mongol Empire's greatest glory, consciences were free. In the long run, however, Lamaism gained the strongest hold and by the time of the fall of the dynasty and the return of the Mongol fragments to their old home, they were Thibetan Buddhists. In centuries of their obscurity they have followed the faith with fanatical zeal. For reasons too numerous and too involved to define, Lamaism tends to break down moral restrictions, to reduce its devotees to hopeless poverty, and to stultify religious feeling of a truly spiritual order. The devotees of the faith are taught not to think, but to put their faith in purely material and mechanical observances, which are often as pathetic as they are absurd. The spinning of prayer wheels, pounding of drums, blowing of trumpets, recitation of prayers in a language which none understands, and the performance of painful pilgrimages, suffice for the layman's religious needs and at the same time line the coffers of the monasteries. In families where there is more than one son, there is at least one devoted to the priesthood, and the hordes of these idle, profligate and non-productive priest-sons, have drained the people dry, have set them the most atrocious moral examples, and have served, indirectly, to keep down the birth rate.

The Manchus had little sympathy with this state of affairs when they first came to rule over the Chinese Empire; but they soon found that to retain Mongol allegiance they had to encourage instead of discouraging Lamaism. Then as now, if they went to discuss with the Mongols matters of state or diplomacy, they either met a lama or found one sitting at the elbow of the potentate with whom they had to deal. In those days the Manchus were afraid of the Kalkha tribes, the descendants of Ghengiz' own kinsmen and immediate clans-

men. Their opposition to Lamaism soon gave place to a cultivation of the heads of the Thibetan hierarchy when they found that they could control the Khalkhas through the lamas, and from the time that Thibetan religious affairs came under Manchu control, they were only too eager to see its hold grow upon the Mongols.

The last Manchu Amban in Urga was Santo, a man notorious for his treatment of the Mongols, whom he regarded as inferior beings. He suffered the Chinese trader to cheat them, while he himself was ever ready to inflict upon them the severest punishment and penalties for minor offences. Santo's ambition was to create a powerful military force at Urga; but the internal troubles in China, ending in the revolution in October, 1911, defeated his plans. The Mongols, long suffering under the tyrannies of Santo, saw in this an opportunity to cast off the Manchu yoke. During this period Russia had been carefully watching events on her Asiatic frontier, and had repeatedly requested the Manchu Government not to colonize nor meddle in the administration, nor raise recruits in Mongolia, but no reply was forthcoming. The Manchu Government was endeavouring to create a new province in the east of Mongolia, a section of which ran close to Manchuria, and in view of this it was considered as an integral part of China, and, as such, free trade privileges mentioned in the treaty of 1881 were to be abolished. Russia, being desirous of protecting her interests under this treaty, pressed for a reply to her demands from Peking. Proposals were submitted to the Russian Government to be met by counter proposals; but China did not move any further in the matter. She was in the throes of a revolution. The Manchu Amban Santo had fled to Siberia, the Mongols had declared their independence and had sent a special mission to Petrograd with the object of coming to an understanding upon their affairs. The result of this mission was successful, in so far that it obtained the support of the Russian Government and its recognition of Outer Mongolia as an independent state:

but, for this support, the Mongols gave a substantial *quid pro quo*, as witness the Urga agreement and protocol of November 3, 1912—in which Russian subjects enjoy exclusive trading, mining and fishing rights in Outer Mongolia.

Early in February, 1916, there arrived in Peking, Prince Tse Tse Khan, accompanied by a large suite as special envoy of the Hutukh'tu or spiritual and temporal sovereign of Mongolia. The object of his mission was to convey greetings from the Hutukhtu to the President of the Republic and to acknowledge the acceptance of the terms of the Tripartite Agreement. His mission settled all outstanding differences between the Chinese Government and the Mongol Princes in Urga. Outer Mongolia is now an autonomous State ruled by the Hutukhtu or Bogda Khan, who is also the third living God in the lamaist hierarchy.

Having well nigh overturned the world in the days of their expansion, and having risen to the rule of a score of Asiatic Kingdoms, the Mongols are back where their fathers were a thousand years ago, where instead of having little tribal wars to wage and cattle raids to perpetrate, they are called upon to deal with their neighbours with 20th century diplomacy and at the same time to carry the weight of a religious system which is too heavy to bear. If one can forget that there is little or no hope for the independence of this once great race, the individual Mongol on his horse dashing in and out among his tents and cattle thrills one to a recollection of the heroic epoch, and it is this impression of primitive vigour, belied by the political status of the people as a whole, which fascinates the Occidental and takes him into forbidding country on trying and monotonous journeys.

CHAPTER II.

THE JOURNEY TO MONGOLIA.

The old saying that all roads lead to Rome applies equally well to Urga, for it is the chief centre of religious thought and the seat of the third living God in the lamaist hierarchy. But of all the roads meeting in Urga, the most travelled is that which starts from Kalgan, traverses the Gobi to the Mongolian Capital and finally terminates at Kiachta on the Siberian frontier. Before the advent of the Trans-siberian railway this was Russia's highway of commerce with China, and the recognized short cut for official missions between Urga, Peking and the Russian capitals, and although the coming of the railway shortened the journey to those places and the improved maritime communications diverted the transport of merchandise into other channels, the old camel trails are still used and form a picturesque background for the history of all modern progress in communication.

The journey to Urga in winter is not a pleasant one, especially if you elect to start from Kalgan and trek across the Gobi in a cart. The seven hundred miles of desert, storm-swept and dreary, present no features of interest. There are no hills, no trees and few signs of human habitation to relieve the mournful monotony of the vast, cheerless steppe, and as you jog along the well rutted trail, filling in the dull moments by dreaming, a feeling of numbness creeps into the brain caused by the cold, penetrating air, and renders your sense of depression less intense. One day is like another, all bivouacs are the same, and the chief interest is divided between trying to keep warm and to maintain some of the enthusiasm felt when leaving Kalgan, the jumping off place for the back of beyond.

At first I was for starting from Kalgan; but previous experience of the Gobi in winter dissuaded me from making the hard journey of thirty days in bitter February weather, and I decided to go to Verkhne-Udinsk on the Trans-siberian railway, to set out for Kiachta, an old border market place, and to enter Mongolia by the caravan route from the north. Making easy stages through Manchuria by rail, I came to Harbin and then settled down for a few days to put the finishing touches to my plans and equipment.

The finding of a suitable Chinese servant cost no little effort and afforded considerable amusement, as many of the applicants who failed to possess the necessary qualifications were not at all backward in their demands for wages and in their stipulation of the gratuities which they expected to receive at the end of the journey. A rough diamond by the name of Wong finally qualified, not so much by his appearance, which was not engaging, as by his knowledge of the means of travel in rough country. During my stay in Harbin, Wong was very useful, assisting materially in the preparations for the journey. He suggested many things, which, at first, seemed to be unnecessary, but which later proved to be useful. He knew little about Mongolia, and less about its people; but his fertile imagination helped him to embroider many a tale, and had he been allowed to buy all that he thought would be required, there would have been a very heavy charge for excess baggage on the journey to Verkhne-Udinsk, and much more ballast to discard for the delectation of Mongol tribesmen on the later stages of the journey.

When everything was at last in readiness, Wong went to the station in charge of a number of miscellaneous packages and in the company of a few of his compatriots whom he had met during his four days in Harbin. I followed with fewer burdens and joined the crowd which a fine evening brought to the station to see the train come in from Vladivostok. Some of the people were the regular habitués of the railway station, which partakes of the nature of a club in all Siberian

towns and along the Chinese Eastern railway, while others had come for the purpose of welcoming friends or of bidding them farewell. On the arrival of the train there was the greatest confusion, for everyone wanted to get aboard at the same time, greatly to the annoyance of those who wanted to alight. Frantic cries for porters were heard from one end of the platform to the other, to be answered by "*Seichass*," meaning, "in a moment," but which in practice may mean never. Wong was lost in the crowd—it was no use attempting to find him,—and the porter who had undertaken to find my compartment had disappeared, leaving me with my bundles in the middle of a lot of excited people. There was only one thing to do—await with resignation the issue of events. Muttered anathemas and apologies were distinctly audible in the crowd, which by sheer weight of numbers held in counterpoise the resistance of the unhappy passengers, who were vainly striving to force an exit. For a few minutes there was a deadlock, and, but for the timely intervention of the station officials, supplemented by the renewed exertions of those endeavouring to alight, the struggle might have been attended by serious results.

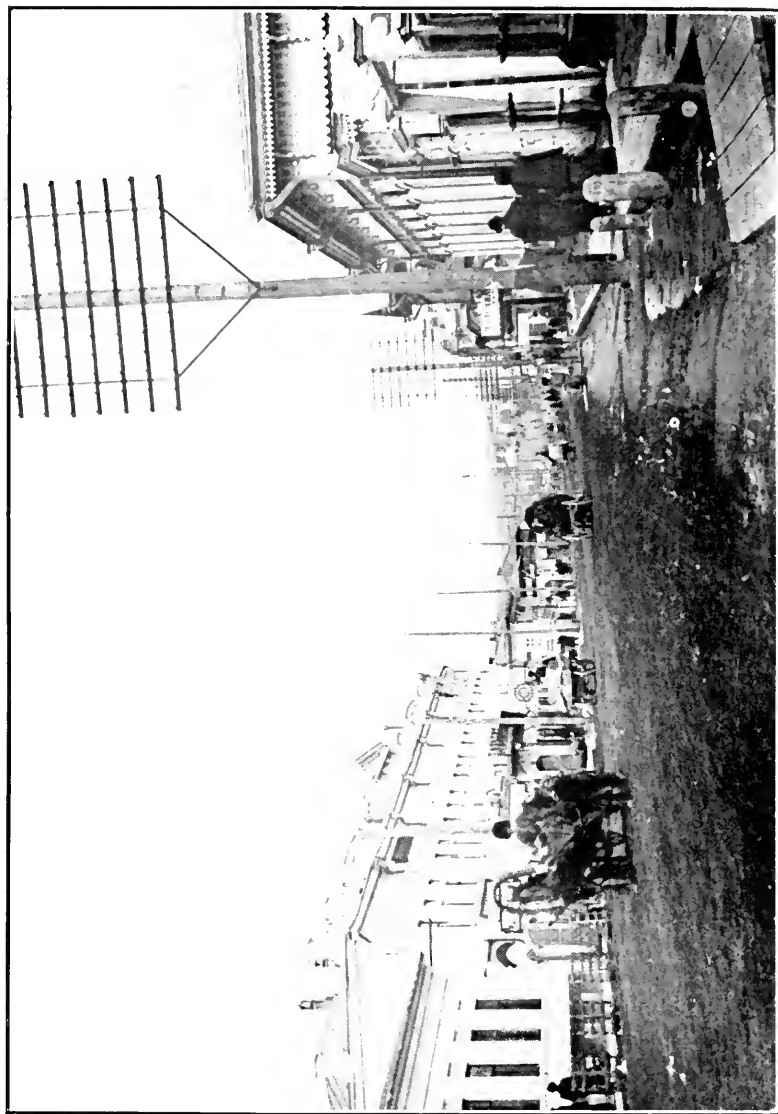
My porter reappeared without the little white apron all Russian porters wear. He had lost it in the scrimmage and seemed more concerned about that than anything else. He had, however, found my compartment, which was more important.

The next morning we found ourselves well on our way across Manchuria. At each stopping place there was the spectacle of the railway guards, a motley crowd of Chinese coolies and others clad in sheepskin coats, and in the crowd a fair sprinkling of Mongols easily recognizable. Between stations we had the discomforts of Siberian travel and the prospect of a cold, bleak and dreary country to divide our attention. There one travels, as in China, with all the comforts of home in his luggage, for he has no reason to expect any by the way. The post train supplies no soap, towels, hot water, bedding

or meals, so the seasoned traveller carries all. Hot water has to be raced for at the various stations, while the stops at many places are long enough to permit passengers to alight and eat in the restaurants. At each stop there was a rush for the *Kipyalok*, where boiling water is always obtainable, and a more amusing sight than that of passengers of all degrees, sprinting along the platform with all manner of vessels, is not to be found in any part of Europe.

Travelling through Manchuria at this time of the year, the weather is cold and the country bleak and dreary. The monotony is sometimes broken by the occasional sight of a lonely caravan winding its way across the storm-swept plains. The air was keen, but nevertheless refreshing, and we welcomed the long and frequent stops to escape into the fresh air after the close confinement in the over-heated and stuffy compartments and corridors. On leaving the Manchurian plains behind, the physical appearance of the country begins to change on approaching the Kinghan range. A mountainous country, with steep gradients winding in and around the rugged valley, opens up to view as the train slowly ascends to the top of the Sheyduu Pass, which connects the valley of the Sungari with that of the river Argun; both of these rivers being tributaries of the Amur. The heights around were capped with snow and covered with pine and larch, presenting under the aspect of winter a wild and impressive scene.

Passing through Hailar in the afternoon of our second day we came that night to Manchuria, the border town, where we all had to alight and submit to the usual ordeal of customs examination of baggage and scrutiny of passports before being allowed to enter Siberia. There are few travelling experiences more trying than a Russian examination of baggage, especially when one has firearms and ammunition and a number of packages of unwonted shapes and sizes; but when I responded to the customary question "Have you anything to declare?" by going into an explanation of the contents of my bags, the official passed me, to my surprise, after asking a few



Page 10

*Main Thoroughfare in Verkhne-Udinsk, the starting point for Selenginsk and Kiachta.
On the old Caravan Route to China*

questions. A careful examination of passports followed, and I was then free to enter the buffet and await the departure of the train for Verkne-Udinsk.

A study of the human beings who had gone through the customs ordeal and were crowded into the station with their baggage occupied me until the departure of the train. At railway stations in Siberia the traveller obtains a comprehensive insight into Russian life in the far eastern part of this vast continent. They have both the air of social rendezvous and that of immigration stations. Immigrants with their belongings tied up in bundles crowd the spacious waiting rooms and await with stoic patience the departure of the train which will convey them to their destination. In all these waiting rooms there are Ikons before which these simple folk perform their acts of devotion. Being a frontier town the population is very mixed—Russians, Chinese, Mongols, Buriats—the scene has its interest although the smell at times in the overcrowded, overheated, and unventilated rooms is somewhat overpowering. It is a kind of clearing house for human beings who submit to the process of being sorted out and despatched in different directions.

On looking out of the window next morning the landscape was picturesque. A fine mountainous country, with well-wooded valleys opened up to view as the train proceeded on its journey westwards. Trees decked out in their mantles of snow lent a fairy-like and fantastic charm to the scene. Dotted about the valleys were the log cabins of the settlers, the cattle sunning themselves under the shelter of the out-houses and sheds, while here and there frozen streams shone like threads of silver in the sunlight.

Between the frontier town and Verkne-Udinsk, the terminus of my railway journey, we passed through the town of Chita, which a hundred years ago was a Cossack outpost, but which now has all the earmarks of a fashionable city. As a summer resort it is popular, because it lies in a charming situation on the bank of a small tributary of the Amur,

2,300-ft. above sea level. The nucleus of the population was a band of nobles exiled to this remote spot after the outbreak in Petrograd on the 24th of December, 1825, and its principle street is named the Damskaya as a tribute to the loyal wives who shared their husbands' exile.

We had no opportunity to study closely the boasted prosperity and fashion of Chita, but rolled on to Verkne-Udinsk, where we alighted, Wong and I, with our many bundles. The town is a small one, near the confluence of the rivers Selenga and Uda, and is some distance from the railway station. A pleasant drive along a good road soon brought us to the top of a hill overlooking the town, which was beginning to show signs of life. The country was covered with snow and an almost continuous string of carts was plainly visible against the white background, winding its way snake-like along the frozen surface of the river.

The driver pulled up before an inn, a miserable-looking one-storey place which, at first glance, had little to recommend it beyond the shelter it afforded from the wind and weather. However, looking back and judging it not by European standards of comfort and civilization, I found myself at times longing for its congenial warmth and a plate of delicious *borsch* or *schtchee* when trying to find shelter from the biting winds that sweep down from the frozen passes of the Altai range.

It soon became known that a foreigner had arrived and was on his way to Urga, and, before I had been able to finish breakfast, the inn was literally besieged by carters who were desirous of offering their services to convey me as far as Kiachta. I sought the advice of mine host, an old resident of Semitic origin, and a most obliging fellow, who suggested taking advantage of the fine weather to travel by motor car, and sending the heavy baggage by *telega* in charge of Wong. A small motor transport service, also owned by an enterprising co-religionist of the innkeeper, carries passengers, when the opportunity offers, between Verkne-Udinsk and Kiachta, wea-



ther and roads permitting. The chauffeur was summoned to the inn and there ensued a discussion about the state of the road which seemed to enter very largely into the calculation of the charge demanded for hire of the car. Having satisfactorily concluded terms, it was arranged that we should start soon after daylight on the following morning, which left me free to see something of the town and put the final touches to my preparations for the journey.

Verkhne-Udinsk although a small place appears to be a busy one. It is on the old caravan route which crosses the Gobi desert, and in former days was the scene of much commerce with China. There is still an appreciable amount of traffic with Mongolia in native produce, which is exchanged for goods manufactured in and exported from Russia; but since tea and other Chinese produce are now largely imported into Russia by sea, transport of these products by the overland route has fallen off considerably.

There is another disturbing element in the trade relations between Russia and China, viâ Verkhne-Udinsk, and that dates from the abolition of the free trade zone in 1912, which extended 50 versts on both sides of the Mongol-Siberian frontier. A few years ago Chinese merchants were established in the town and did a thriving business; but that feature of commercial life is rapidly disappearing, and soon there will only remain Chinese employed in the houses of Russians as domestic servants.

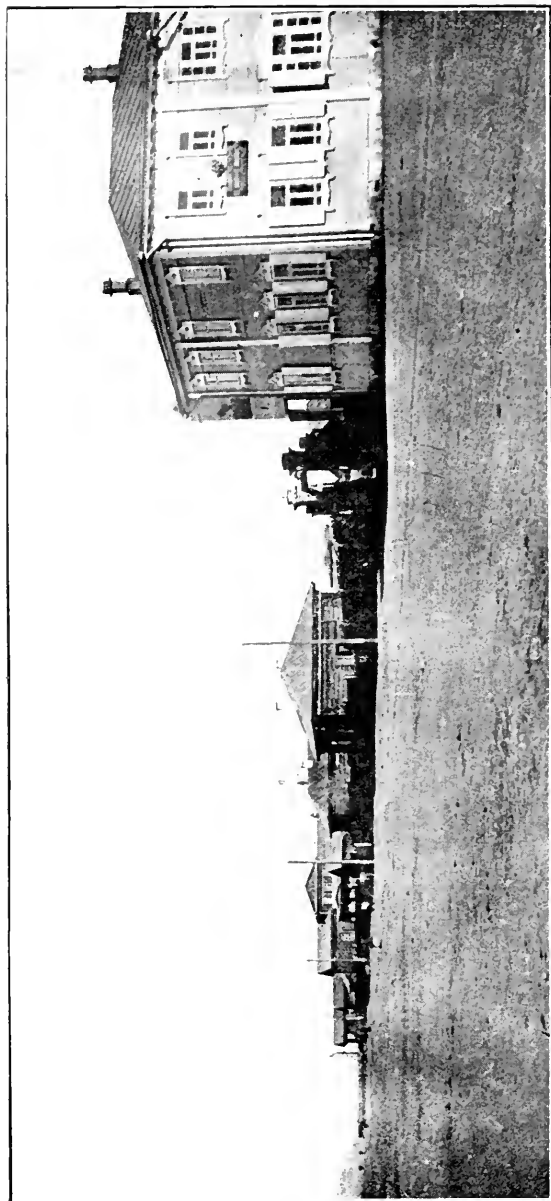
The street life is very interesting. Buriats, Mongols, and a sprinkling of Chinese, their bright-coloured, picturesque dresses standing out in pleasant contrast to the sombre-hued attire of the Russians.

On the day of departure the car was outside the inn at an early hour, and, after packing in baggage and provisions in every accessible place, we were ready to start. A small crowd of carters and others had assembled outside, curious no doubt to see us off, and I overheard them speculating upon the probability of our reaching

Kiachta in the stipulated eighteen hours. The motor car service was then still a novelty and was regarded by owners of humble vehicles as inimical to their interests. Their remarks were not very reassuring and I began to wonder whether I had done the right thing in making arrangements to travel by car, in view of the reported doubtful condition of the road in places. We then drove to the garage to take in a supply of petrol and have another look at the tyres. There was another car in readiness to start, with three Russian officers bound for Kiachta, and it was agreed that we should keep together and render each other assistance in case of need. After rearranging the baggage and provisions so as to secure the maximum space and comfort, we left the garage with all the good wishes of the proprietor for a safe and speedy journey. The road was quite hard and we literally flew along, scattering the dogs in all directions, much to the amusement of the few early risers, who stopped and watched us as we sped by.

In crossing the river we had our first delay, which was by no means to be our last. Our car, in passing, cracked the ice, and the machine carrying our three Russian friends broke through. All efforts to extricate them were unavailing, until help was summoned from the garage. According to our agreement we were obliged to assist, and as the extrication of the motor car became more hopeless, I found myself envying Wong who had set out by the more cumbersome but less erratic native cart. After a time, however, when we were fully persuaded that we could render no assistance, we went on our way, and on reaching terra firma made good time along the beaten track to our first stopping place.

It was a cosy little place of one room, fitted up with beds and not overheated as most places are in Siberia. Regulations governing the use of the Post Road were hanging up in a conspicuous place for the informatoin of travellers. The samovar was soon brought, and, having unpacked a few tinned things, we snatched a hurried meal while waiting for the other car.



We had not long to wait, for half an hour later we were rejoiced to hear the sound of a motor horn, and, on looking out of the window, were relieved to see our officer friends, their car not looking any worse for its immersion.

We soon resumed our journey, overtaking those travelling in *telegas* who had passed us earlier in the day and had witnessed, without any apparent signs of sympathy, our unhappy plight. We naturally felt entitled to a little revenge, and the chauffeurs hailed them, as we rapidly overtook them, with a few bantering remarks. Our triumph did not last long as our troubles were not at an end, for we were plagued throughout the journey with delays occasioned by snowdrifts and bogs, bursting tyres and herds of stampeding animals.

The valley of the Selenga is wide, with well-wooded banks and fine pasture lands. In summer a small steamer plies between Verkhne-Udinsk, Selinginsk and Uj Kiachta, and I am told that the journey and scenery at that time of the year are delightful.

We were gradually approaching a more difficult part of the road at the third posting stage, where we were informed that the snow on the hills, over which the road passed, lay in deep drifts, and that it would be necessary to take a few horses along with us as well as a guide.

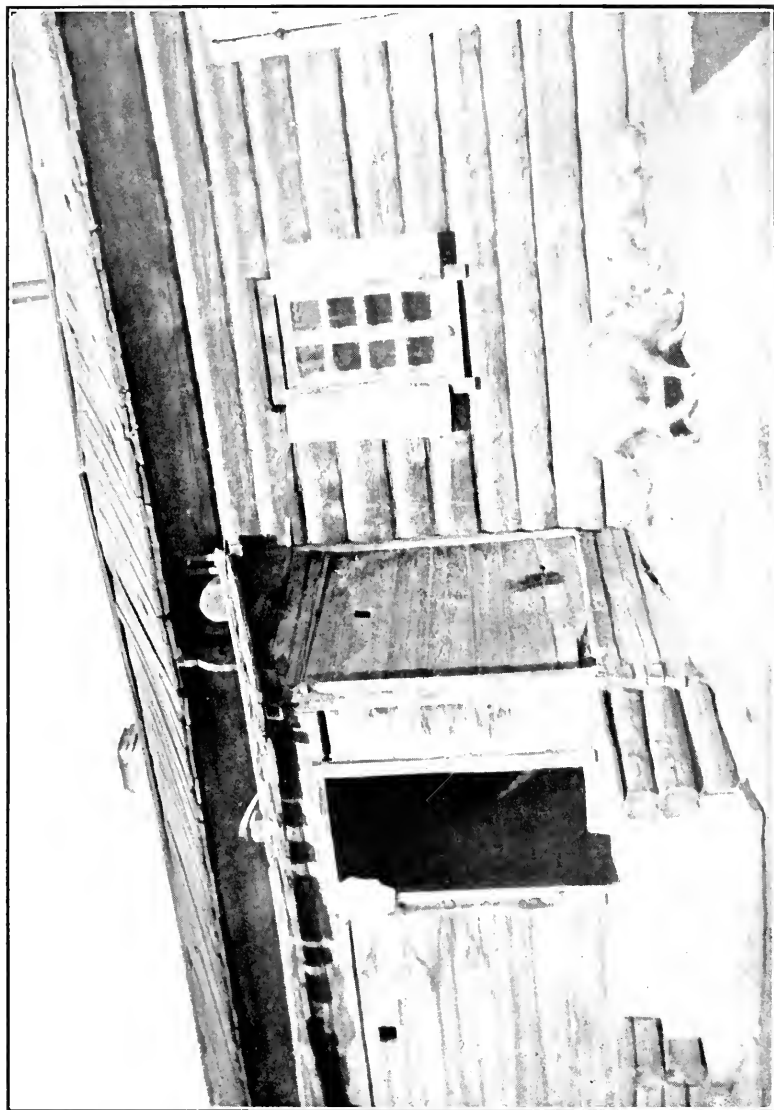
Although we acted upon this advice it soon became evident that we were not to reach Troiskasarvsk that night, and that we should be lucky if we were to spend the night at Selinginsk. Accompanied by a peasant and three horses, we had a laborious climb, and after many long delays, reached the other side of the hill. News that the ice at Selinginsk was on the point of breaking added to our impatience, but accidents to one car or the other, confusion of roads and other mishaps which kept us on the road, sleepless and miserable in the icy wind until nearly morning, contrived to delay our arrival.

At last we reached the top of one of the hills overlooking the village of Selinginsk, and, from this point on, the road

was fairly good and presented few difficulties. Dropping down a gentle slope, the way led through a fine forest for several versts, from which we emerged into the open country, and soon we arrived at Selinginsk. It was 4 a.m.; the inmates of the posting station were sound asleep, and nothing but the barking of the dogs in the yard and the tooting of our motor horns broke the silence of that peaceful Siberian hamlet. A sleepy-headed Buriat opened the gates and we drove inside the compound with feelings of joy. There were several other travellers sleeping on the floor rolled up in their sheepskins and there was scarcely any space for us. Not even our arrival disturbed them, for they slept on through all the noise we made in getting some of our baggage inside, and the cold wind that swept into the log hut every time the door was opened.

Selinginsk is a village on the river Selenga, and was the scene of the labours of two English missionaries to the Buriat Mongols, who opened their mission in the year 1818. Their mission was not successful, and, moreover, their work was regarded by the authorities with some suspicion, for in 1841 the Mission was closed by command of the Emperor Nicolas. The population is chiefly Buriat and appears to be poor. One also sees Russian settlers of the peasant class, who do not seem to live under any more favourable conditions than their Buriat compatriots. In fact the Russian peasant in this part of the Transbaikal is poor, the whole family living in one room. To find a peasant with a well stocked farmyard is the exception rather than the rule, and it is only the keepers of posting stations who show any signs of prosperity, comparatively speaking.

Shortly after sunrise we resumed our journey, and when we came to cross the Selenga we found that the ice was giving way in places and that the peasants on the opposite bank had constructed a bridge from their shore to a point on the ice surface that was sound. For the use of this structure they were charging a toll which the chauffeurs were ready enough to pay; but our Russian fellow travellers, announcing that they



were on the Tzar's business, refused to pay, and after a disagreeable altercation with the villagers, took us on our way. The country folk were, however, in a bad temper and our chauffeurs looked forward to their return with no pleasure, while in my mind the whole matter left an unpleasant impression.

The road was sandy and the going in many places, especially uphill, was very difficult. At 3 p.m. we caught sight of the church of Uj Kiachta, the landing place for travellers making the trip by river, as the steamer cannot go any further owing to shallow water. Uj Kiachta is some 30 versts from Troiskasarvsk, which can be reached in three hours in a *telega* and probably owes its existence to the river traffic, which is very considerable in the open water season.

From Uj Kiachta the road runs over a steep sandy hill and through a forest; the climb, especially in a heavily laden motor car, is very slow and difficult. Cresting the hill and running down an easy decline through the forest, we at last caught sight of the outskirts of Troiskasarvsk, and soon reached the only hotel in the place, having been 33 hours on the road.

After two days without rest, full of dust and travel-stained, our first inquiry, after we had been shown to the room allotted to us, was when we could have a bath; but to our great disappointment we were told that it was out of the question, as there was not such a thing in the hotel, and we should have to go to the public bath when the attendants resumed work after the holidays. The hotel left very much to be desired in point of convenience and comfort; but being the only place of its kind, it was a case of Hobson's choice. The innkeeper, a dirty unkempt Bulgar, did all he possibly could to supply the want: but it was not a success. The inn, a small one, was already overcrowded so that we were obliged to double up in the only available space, where the daylight scarcely penetrated the gloom and where the stale atmosphere seldom had an opportunity of escaping, owing to the double windows being

securely fastened and pasted over with paper to exclude the weather.

There was a family of six people occupying one room, with all their travelling impedimenta, and when one considers what this means in a country where it is the custom to travel with bedding and cooking utensils, etc., owing to the absence of accommodation, the appearance of the room and the foul state of the air therein can be more easily imagined than described. The climate in winter is very severe—the thermometer often registering 70 and 80 degrees of frost, which necessitates taking every precaution to keep out the cold. This probably accounts in no small measure for the strong disinclination on the part of the residents to ventilate their houses until the spring is well advanced.

Notwithstanding these conditions, the people living in this part of Asia seem to be very robust, and they had need to be when one thinks of the extreme rigours of the climate.

CHAPTER III.

KIACHTA AND THE URGAL TRAIL.

At a point on the Siberian-Mongol border, where the old caravan trail crosses, there are three towns, two Russian, and one Chinese, which are separated by imaginary and political boundaries only : but which merge into one large community. The traveller coming from the north arrives first in Troiskarsk, which is prettily situated in a narrow valley with wooded sides. It is a substantial and seemingly prosperous little town, composed of white houses with spacious courtyards about them, and endowed with some fine churches, public schools, and a museum which contains an interesting archaeological and anthropological collection.

Troiskarsk merges into Kiachta, the historic frontier town through which the vast quantity of China's trade with Russia passed before railways were built and steamship lines established modern transport between the East and the West. In the early days Kiachta was a busy mart. Goods passed from Chinese to Russian hands, and fortunes were made quickly and easily on both sides of the border.

Kiachta, like most of the towns in Siberia, is a landmark in the history of Russian conquest and colonization, for the history of Siberia is the story of virgin country, battles with nomadic tribes, and of adventurers, hunters, traders, exiles and explorers, who followed in the van of the Cossack invasion. One may say that the conquest of the country grew out of a commercial enterprise conceived on a large scale, for we find that in the early part of the 16th century the brothers Strogonoff, Grigori and Yakov were granted special trading rights and were given lands in the region of the Tobol, in return for which they undertook to build forts, subdue hostile tribes, and open up the way for trade. A little later Yermak crossed the

Urals at the head of a band of Cossacks and after a series of fights with roving bands of robbers and nomads, he laid siege to Sibir which he finally entered as victor, putting Khan Kuchum to flight. In the 17th century the Cossacks moved eastward, founding little strongholds along the Tartar trails, posts that are now cities, such as Tomsk, Omsk, Krasnoyarsk, Irkutsk and Yakutsk, and it requires little effort of the imagination to call up a picture of the past and to people the scene again with some of the bold spirits who followed on the heels of the defeated Mongol hordes.

A hundred yards or so beyond the Kiachta Custom House there is a stone marking the boundary between Siberia and Mongolia, and a little further on, on Mongol soil, is the Chinese "City of Trade," the Mai-Mai-Cheng, which was once a veritable storehouse for all the goods of the East which had a sale in Europe. The streets are narrow and the houses are conventionally Chinese. Among its public buildings are a theatre, now closed, and a magistrate's yamên, now unoccupied. The whole place now wears an air of desolation, for political and commercial changes have robbed it of its wealth and therefore of its inhabitants. Most of the shops are closed, and the Chinese whom one sees in the streets are not the fat and pompous merchants of the last generation, but coolies in listless, loitering groups. The town is moribund, the big hong's have closed and their proprietors and underlings have gone back to China, for the flow of commerce into other channels and the abolition of free trade on both sides of the border have reduced the once great trade to a petty traffic.

After passing down the main street for a few hundred yards between rows of deserted shops and warehouses, the visitor comes suddenly upon an open market place which bustles with the concentrated vitality of the dying community. From here one sees the first of Mongolia—a long range of mountains standing out sharply against the sky—and round about one in the market place Chinese hawkers at their wooden stands cry aloud their wares and made a display of business activity.

There is little magnificence left in any of this and the traveller's first study of life over the Mongol border does not give him any impression of the nation's greatness or glory. The cleansing of the streets is left to the dogs, the garments of the natives are filthy and the beggars are importunate, and yet here, as in Kalgan, there is a charm about the whole which awakens interest and a desire to penetrate into the country and learn something about its people.

I had the good fortune in Verkhne-Udinsk to meet Mr. Henningsen of the Chinese Telegraph service, who was on his way to Urga, and we travelled together. It was he who volunteered to ascertain the fate of his friend the late Mr. Grant of the same service, who was captured by the Mongol bandit Malunga while on a journey across the Gobi inspecting the telegraph line. At the time Mr. Henningsen undertook this dangerous task, the Mongols and Chinese were fighting outside Kalgan and after considerable trouble he finally persuaded the Chinese Government to allow him to pass outside the Chinese lines into Mongolia. Dr. Wolf and Mr. Giles of Peking volunteered to accompany him, and the little party, on arriving in the neighbourhood where Mr. Grant was captured, was surrounded by Malunga's men and conducted to their chief, who kept them closely guarded for more than two weeks, during which time Malunga questioned them closely as to the object of their presence in Mongolia. Mr. Henningsen learnt what had happened to Mr. Grant, and Malunga eventually permitted the party to return. It transpired that when Mr. Grant, with his Chinese servants and assistants, was captured by Malunga's men, he was told that he might go provided he left his Chinese behind, which he refused to do, and when he was given the choice of leaving without them or of being shot with them, he walked in front of the firing party and met his death rather than desert his servants. Malunga and 70 of his followers were subsequently caught by Mongol soldiers sent from Urga and they paid the full penalty of their crimes.

At the time of my visit to Kiachta the political situation

in Outer-Mongolia was a very interesting one. The tripartite agreement had not long been reached, and China's attitude towards the new autonomous state, which was formerly an integral part of her own Empire, was not friendly. Moreover, the Russian Government had secured certain substantial political and commercial advantages, and its officials were inclined to show an inquisitiveness tinged with suspicion in the movements of any foreign traveller to Mongolia.

At first I anticipated some difficulty in obtaining permission to cross the frontier, but when I saw the frontier commissioner and had presented a letter from the Russian Minister in Peking I was agreeably surprised to find that no obstacles were placed in my way. The journey to Urga occupied five days and we decided to hire *telegas*, the drivers of which were thoroughly recommended by the innkeeper who doubtless had a more than friendly interest in the matter. They were outside the Hotel next morning at 7 o'clock, although we had arranged the day before that they should be there at 6 a.m., but "*nitchero*," it does not matter, as they say in Russia, whether you start an hour earlier or later, the horses can only do so much and no more. The *telega* which is used in this part of Siberia is a springless vehicle with a basket-work body, to which are harnessed three horses, one in the shafts and one on either side. As a means of conveyance it is uncomfortable, especially over a rough road. We took the precaution of packing as much hand baggage as possible at the bottom of the basket-work body, covering it with blankets, skins and cushions to render the jolting less noticeable; but in spite of this we felt it all the same, especially when going at a sharp trot over a particularly uneven and stony road. Mr. Henningsen and I occupied one *telega* together, and Wong and the baggage, beds, provisions, and cooking utensils, the other. We also carried sufficient fodder for six ponies for the trip.

At 10 o'clock we were ready to start, and after taking leave of our Bulgarian host, we soon crossed the frontier into

Mongolia, following the old caravan route which runs direct to Peking. It was a fairly even road for some miles, but soon began to rise, and brought us into an extensive forest of pines and firs, varied by silver beech, which the driver told us extended for many versts east and west. Occasionally we saw Mongols cutting wood, which they transport to Kiachta by cart.

Our first halt was 30 versts from Kiachta, where we found a rest-house used by travellers, at which one could obtain the use of a samovar for a few kopecks. These rest-houses had only just been put up and in point of cleanliness and accommodation were very far below the standard of those on the way from Verkhne-Udinsk.

After our meal we continued the journey for another 30 versts over fine country with pretty scenery. The snow was still to be seen lying in drifts out of the sun. How we rattled and jolted over the ground! Sometimes we went at a canter, the *telega* swaying from side to side as the *yamschiks* urged their ponies forward. At times when descending a hill at a gallop, we thought our last hour had come, and in vain we remonstrated with the drivers, who in true Russian fashion shouted "*Nitchevo.*" Our expostulations were in vain and in the end we resigned ourselves to our fate. A more nerve-shattering travelling experience it would be difficult to imagine.

Just as it was beginning to grow dusk we sighted, on the bank of the frozen Yero, our resting place for the night. It was the only sign of human habitation we had seen since leaving the first rest-house after lunch. Here the ponies were taken out and attached to the *telegas* by their halters. To our disappointment we found other travellers already in possession of the only available accommodation, and fast asleep. The hut was very dirty and overheated by a huge Russian stove which seemed to take up all the room. There was no ventilation of any kind, and, as every effort was made to keep the door shut, the atmosphere in the one and only room could be better imagined than described. Henningsen and I decided to

sleep out in the *telega*, notwithstanding the temperature, which by this time was very low. We lined the bottom of this vehicle with all the skin rugs we could find, and shifted it into a position to protect us from the wind. The wind increased in force until at midnight there was a blizzard from the North and, curled up in the *telega*, we had the greatest difficulty in keeping warm. It was so cold that even the ponies put their noses in our cart to find shelter from the wind. When the day broke, we crawled out of our uncomfortable bed, suffering from want of sleep, cold and cramp in the limbs from lying in one position so long, and went across to the hut where we found Wong preparing tea—a very welcome beverage after our night in the open.

We were on the road again with the wind behind us and, having crossed the Yero not many yards from our halting place the previous night, we followed the cart track winding through a valley which has all the characteristics of Siberian scenery. A few hours later the weather showed signs of improvement, and by midday the sun burst through the clouds, much to our delight. Here and there off the road we caught sight of Mongol *yurts*, and of sheep and cattle grazing on the sides of the hills and in the sheltered parts of the valley. When we came to a particularly stiff climb we invariably eased the load and stretched our legs. Sometimes we rested on the tops of the hills to give the ponies a spell, and this enabled us to get a good view of the surrounding country for many miles.

In the afternoon of the following day we reached another small station where it is usual to halt for the rest of the day. From the Yero to this place, we had done 60 versts without stopping longer than a few minutes to rest the ponies after a stiff climb. Here we found a tolerably clean *isba* of a better type than we had hitherto encountered, and we made ourselves as comfortable as circumstances permitted. A stream runs through the long valley and on the opposite side we saw a cluster of *yurts* and a temple standing out in the

landscape, conspicuously painted in flaming colours of yellow and red. The scene was also enlivened by ducks and geese, and by plenty of lama duck, a variety peculiar to this part of Asia.

The next morning we set out at 8 o'clock with the knowledge that progress would be slow and tedious over the pass leading to Manhatai, where there is a telegraph station in charge of a Russian. A very stony road leads to the foot of the pass through a well wooded valley. Snow drifts and melting snow, with boulders every few paces, rendered it anything but easy going for pedestrians in heavy boots. The ponies threaded their way cautiously along the track, but the *telegas* rocked from side to side, with a jerky motion, and we were thankful not to be inside, as the jolting and jarring of this springless vehicle must have been trying, to say the least.

Mr. Henningsen and I were walking ahead and just as we came to the top of the pass, a Lama appeared with his servant, leading their ponies. Both stopped and appeared to be apprehensive of danger. The Lama gave the Mongol greeting, to which we responded by raising our right hands, fingers closed and thumbs pointed up. As we approached each other we noticed that the Lama was armed with a Mauser pistol, which, when he saw that we were two inoffensive travellers, he handed back to his servant, who concealed it in the ample folds of his sheepskin coat. He made a few remarks in Mongol which we could not understand, and after trying him in Chinese, we gave him him up as hopeless. We were told by the Russian in charge of the telegraph station that this part of the country is particularly dangerous in the spring and summer, there being many brigands who infest the pass and rob travellers, not stopping short of murder if they offer any resistance.

The descent of the pass on the other side was equally bad going, the road leading into another valley in which we found the telegraph station and a resting place for the night. We

had done 60 versts since the morning, which was not bad considering the state of the roads. There is plenty of game to be found in the neighbourhood of Manhatai, wild boar, ducks, geese, and deer. The Russian in charge of the station is a great sportsman and, as he has very little to do, spends most of his spare time in scouring the country in search of game.

We left Manhatai at eight the next morning. A fine road traversed a long and wide valley in which, for the first time since leaving Kiachta, we saw signs of cultivation. Chinese farms with fine big compounds and outhouses were to be seen all over the fertile land, well watered by mountain streams. We stopped at one farm to buy fodder for the animals and were struck by the well-ordered compounds and evident signs of prosperity of the farmer, who, like all his neighbours in the valley, was a Shantung man. The granaries were underground, being dug out, with openings at the top on a level with the ground large enough to admit a man. We stopped for lunch and a rest at a most evil-smelling and dirty place kept by a Russian of very doubtful character, who, in addition to supplying shelter and stabling for travellers, adds to his income by selling a kind of vodka to the Mongols. We saw several intoxicated Mongols lying about the yard and there was one, who, being admonished by his master, staggered to his feet and made a frantic dash towards his pony, which eluded his grasp, precipitating him headlong to the ground, much to the amusement of his friends. He finally succeeded in catching his pony, and, although scarcely able to walk, was assisted to mount and rode away at a gallop, not moving in the saddle.

We were very pleased to leave this place with its sordid surroundings and filthy accommodation and to continue our journey along a good road, enjoying a particularly fine view of the country over which we had travelled. Towards 9 o'clock that night we reached a small hut on the open road with no compound, kept by a drink-sodden Russian and his wife. They had a family of three small children and we all occupied the same sleeping room, as there was no other. A big stove

in the centre maintained an almost unbearable temperature throughout the night, and this, added to the snoring of our unconscious host, supplemented by the efforts of the tired drivers and the intermittent crying of the youngest member of the family, made sleep impossible.

An early start was made next morning, the last of the journey, and with only 65 versts to cover we were naturally anxious to arrive at our destination. By noon we had reached a sheltered spot in a fine fertile valley, and here it was decided to rest the ponies and make some tea, there being a water hole not far off and a few Mongol tents. A fire was kindled and soon the welcome beverage was served. Scarcely had we commenced our *al fresco* repast when two foreigners were seen approaching on horseback accompanied by a Mongol. They were Mr. Mamen of Urga and Mr. Langebaek of the Chinese Telegraph Service, both stationed in the Mongol Capital. Mr. Langebaek offered me his pony for the remainder of the journey which I gladly accepted after the cramped and uncomfortable seat in the *telega*. No time was lost in making ready for the final stage and soon we were on the road again. After a stiff climb to the summit of the pass, the road lay for several miles amid some fine wild scenery, which gradually changed, losing its picturesque features as we approached the valley of the Tola. An hour before sunset we had reached the top of a hill overlooking a part of the city, and after a brisk trot we found ourselves in the immediate outskirts of Urga.

Entering the city, our attention was immediately arrested by the imposing temples, conspicuous in their colours and gilt ornamentation, which constitute one of the principal features of Urga.

This part of the city is the *Kuren*, in Enclosure, from which the whole takes its various names—*Urga* by a Russian mispronunciation, and the Chinese *Kulun*, through the Chinese inability to pronounce the Mongol name. It is the nucleus of the modern settlement and the end of many long

religious pilgrimages, being the seat of a Buddhist potentate who ranks third in the Tibetan hierarchy and first in the temporal affairs of all the Mongols. In Kuren the lama is supreme. This entire quarter of the city of Urga is devoted to monasteries, lama schools, temples, and the tombs of the saints, and no layman is allowed to take up permanent residence within its limits. The tombs, unique in design and construction, attract the newcomer's attention and divide it with the hordes of idle lamas, whose robes of yellow and scarlet add colour to what would otherwise be a drab and monotonous scene.

Apart from a few well built temples and official buildings, formerly occupied by the Chinese, Urga is not imposing. Seen from any of the neighbouring hills the whole community seems more like a huge encampment than a city, for the majority of its permanent residents, including even the officials who have Chinese *yamêns* at their disposal, prefer their native felt tents of *yurts*, as they are called, and do no more to give them an appearance of permanency than to erect palisades about them. The mountains on the north side are entirely devoid of trees, while on the south side the slopes are covered with trees and a forest several miles in extent clothes the sacred mountain Bogdinol, in which game and wild animals abound. The whole prospect presents few features which stand out and impress themselves upon the visitor, and were it not for the river Tola, which hurries along under emerald banks and disappears through a pass in the mountains to the west, the panorama would be monotonous.

Under the shadow of the sacred mountain, to the south of the lama community, is the palace of the Hutukhtu, the spiritual and temporal ruler of Outer-Mongolia, and to the east, along the highway, is the horse and camel market where Mongols, with their shaggy looking beasts, may be seen in lively converse with prospective buyers and traders, while crowds of interested idlers collect around them, laughing and jesting, and shouting words of advice to their friends.

The thoroughfare is flanked with small but well stocked Russian and Chinese stores, advertising their wares in Russian, Chinese, Mongol and Tibetan. This busy highway opens into a large square, a veritable trading centre for native produce where the Mongols are ever busy displaying hides, skins and wool to Chinese merchants. On the north side of this square there are prayer wheels, temples and Mongol *yurts*, enclosed by fences made of the stems of young trees driven into the ground side by side and caulked with mud. Dogs scavenge the open spaces, routing in the ever increasing heaps of filth and refuse, barking at the approach of strangers, and making savage attacks upon passers-by that venture too near.

The scene is full of animation. Caravans laden with all kinds of merchandise from distant parts of Mongolia and China come to a halt before the *likin*, or excise station, where dues are collected and passes issued. Here also is the old Chinese *yamên* where the last Manchu *Amban* conducted the affairs of the country, and which is now used as an executive office by the Mongol officials, who, out of their aversion to walls and roofs, have left the old offices vacant and have pitched their *yurts* in the courtyards.

Still further to the east, past a gloomy looking prison, is a small Russian community made up of a few Russian houses, the Russian Consulate-General and Mongolore, the offices of the Gold Mining Company, whose workings are on the Yero, north of Urga. Beyond is the Chinese "City of Trade," called the Mai-Mai-Cheng here as in Kiachta, at the entrance of which are some big lama tombs.

Urga is supposedly the site of the birthplace of Ghengiz Khan and the scene of his earliest fights for the independence of his clan; but, for the Mongols, heroic associations are superseded by the importance of Kuren as a religious centre, and for the Chinese and Russians, of course, trade interests are supreme, so one hears no more of Ghengiz than an occasional native balled dedicated to his memory.

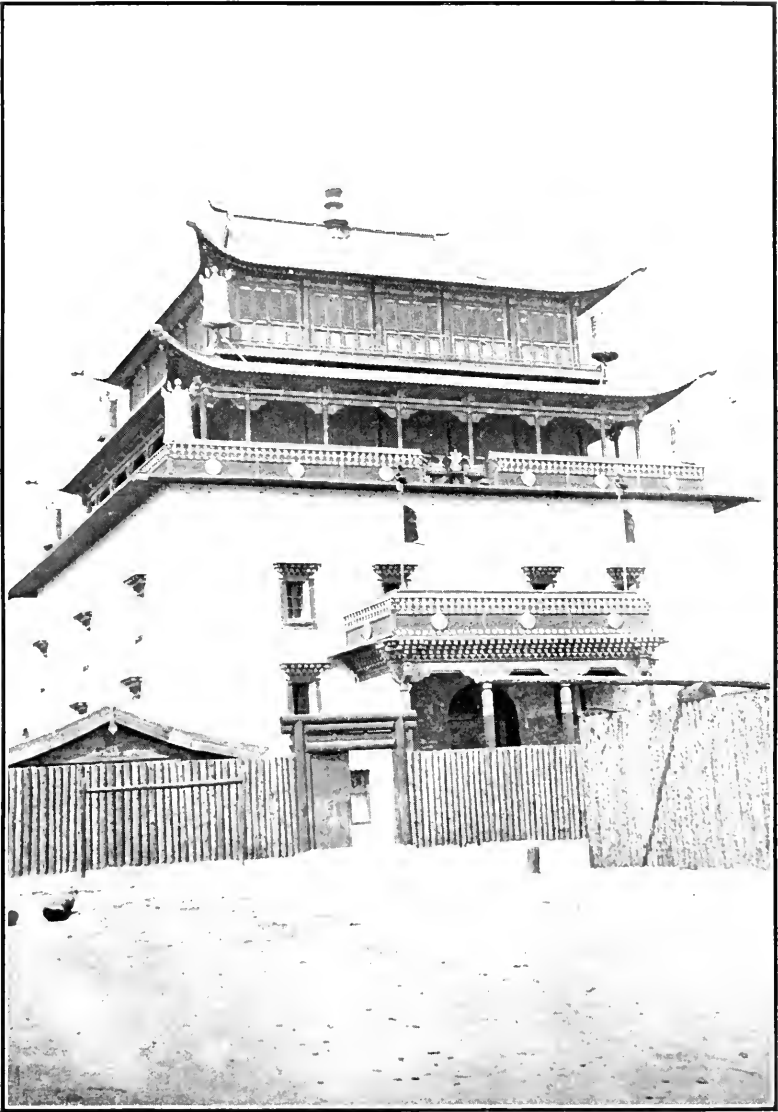
CHAPTER IV.

MONGOL MANNERS AND WAYS.

My first impression of Urga was tinged with disappointment. I had conjured up in my mind a mental picture of the capital of the Sovereign of Mongolia very different from the actual thing, but I found ample compensation for any disappointment I experienced on my arrival, in my daily contact with the people, whose peculiar manners and customs offered a wide and interesting field for study. I was living with Mr. Mamen at Mai-Mai-Cheng, the old Chinese trading centre, where he had quarters in a large compound owned by a Mongol named Lobsenjensen. This worthy Mongol also lived in the same compound with his family, and, in addition to the two Chinese houses therein, he had two *yurts* which he occupied when he felt so disposed.

Lobsenjensen was a man of parts, a good Chinese scholar and incidentally a small official. Nearly every traveller who has visited Urga in recent years has met him and none has come away without a pleasant recollection of his kindness and hospitality. My daily contact with Lobsenjensen gave me an opportunity of learning something about Mongol life, while Mr. Mamen's knowledge of the language and the surrounding country rendered the first few weeks spent in the Capital interesting and instructive.

As Urga is the religious centre of Mongolia, and now the executive centre of Outer Mongolia, and as the religious life of the place is an irresistible attraction to every pious herdsman within a hundred days' journey, the floating population is representative of every tribe, clan and breed of Mongols and one may see there in the course of a month's residence all the various styles of dress which serve more than anything else to mark clan distinctions and classify the numerous divisions of



Temple of the Third Living Buddha

the race. The permanent residents are, however, of one great tribe—the Khalkha (pronounced rather Halha than Kalka)—and in the Tola river basin the indigenes belong to the Tushetu Khanate, or Aimak, which in turn is divided into about a score of clans, each ruled by a prince, duke or *taiji*.

Khalkhas, of whom there are more than 80 clan divisions, have always been regarded as the most vigorous of the Mongol peoples, and their princes have claimed direct descent from Ghengiz Khan, and authority over all the other branches of the vast family for five centuries. Their language is the standard, and in religious devotion of a sort which does not always gain merit in European eyes, they are unrivalled, except perhaps by the Tibetans. As one sees in Urga all types of Mongols, besides the pure Khalkha type, in numbers and under circumstances which no other community can rival, I was particularly interested while there in studying their customs, their traditions, and as much of the language as one can pick up in a few weeks, so as to have a more intelligent understanding of the peoples and country which I expected to visit further west.

The Mongols are a very sturdy race. They are big, powerful and muscular, with broad faces, small squat noses, very prominent cheek bones and black coarse hair. They are frank, generous, hospitable, warm-hearted; but lazy, dirty, thriftless and addicted to drunkenness. The heads of the lamas are shaved to the scalp—in contrast to the lay section of the population which affects a queue. The layman is known in the Mongol tongue as Karahun—a black man.

The benefits to be derived from the use of soap and water they have not yet discovered. They never wash their bodies, seldom do they put water on their faces—the nearest thing I have seen to anything in the nature of washing is when they rinse their mouths after a meal. One thing the Mongol fears more than anything else is water.

The extremes of heat and cold and their draughty habitations are no doubt the principal causes of their suffering from

rheumatism, so noticeably prevalent among them. This accounts in no small degree for their aversion to the use of water, which causes them to avoid camping too near a river and marshy places.

The clothes worn by Mongols bear certain points of resemblance to those of the Chinese. A long outer coat, lined with fur and covered with coloured stuff or silk, is the usual dress for the winter. In warm weather they wear a long cloth coat, if they have the means to buy one, easing it off from the shoulder when the temperature becomes too hot during the day. The very poor people invariably wear sheepskin coats with the woolly side in to keep them warm, and they seldom part with them until they drop off their bodies.

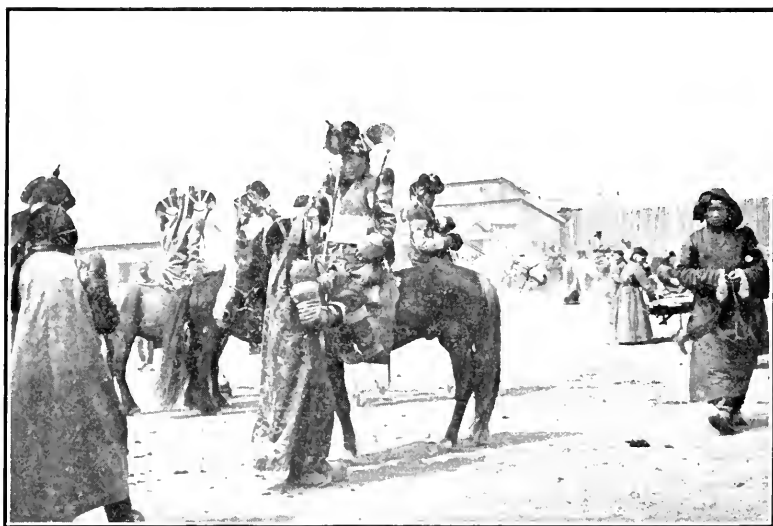
Leather knee-boots, with thick soles and pointed curving toes are affected by both sexes. In winter they put on goatskin socks, while in summer they usually wrap their feet and legs in pieces of cloth. A pointed hat with ear flaps of fur and surmounted by a button denoting the rank of the wearer is jauntily poised on the head and kept in its place by a strap passing under the chin. Two red streamers more than a foot long, with characters on them, hang from the back of this curious headgear and rest on the shoulders.

Trousers, the same as are worn by Chinese, and a coarse kind of cotton shirt practically complete the principal articles of clothing. The men have a belt made of material which they wind round their outer coat and fasten by tucking in the end. A tobacco pouch, tinder box and knife hang from the belt and the pipe is invariably stuck in their spacious boots.

The dress of the woman is very little different from that of the man. She wears practically the same garments, except that they are a little more ornate. To distinguish her from the man she has no belt, and the sleeves of her outer coat are puffed at the shoulders, a fashion very much affected some years ago in Europe. Curious to relate, when referring in conversation with Mongols to a woman one usually speaks of her as a beltless person in contra-distinction to the man. The



Headdress of a Mongol Married Woman (left) and an Unmarried Girl (right)



The Mongol Headdress is no handicap to Horsemanship

women have a curious way of dressing their hair. It is arranged on a kind of wooden frame in two strands stuck together, and curves out like the horns of a sheep, only at right angles from the sides of the head. Bands of silver and gold are fastened around it, while the tapering points are hidden in silver tassels that just rest upon the breasts. This style of head-dressing is employed by married women. Unmarried girls are only permitted to wear an ordinary queue, bound together near the end by a piece of bright coloured silk.

They all show a marked preference for bright colours and rich embroidery, which is usually brought into the country from Peking. When dressed in their best for some ceremonial occasion, both the man and the woman are studies in daring colour schemes, which are seldom displeasing to the eye.

Except for a few high officials who live in semi-foreign houses, the Mongol population lives in *yurts*, enclosed by high wooden palisades. These singular habitations are invariably constructed of grey felt, stretched upon lattice-work frames fastened together by means of raw hide thongs, and are from $4\frac{1}{2}$ to 6 feet high and 12 to 15 feet in diameter. Like a tent, they have a bit of flapping felt for the sole entrance; but the portal is so low that one has to stoop to get inside. There is an opening at the top to allow the smoke from within to escape into the outer air. This also serves the purpose of a ventilation hole and a skylight. In the middle of the *yurt* a fire is kept constantly burning, the fuel being *argol*, or animal droppings, which provides a good heat and a strong odour. Opposite to the entrance is usually a small chest, which also partially serves the purpose of an altar, for it is generally surmounted by a picture or image of Buddha. Cushions cover the floor on which all the occupants recline.

The inside of the *yurt* is blackened by smoke. The European who enters one of these enclosures for the first time is conscious of an unpleasant sensation and is instantly repelled by the thought of the vermin that infest the place; but the

warmth of the interior after the cold outside and the chance to repose from the fatigues of a long day in the saddle prove temptations that he makes little attempt to resist.

The lot of the woman is not an enviable one. She appears to do more than her share of the work, even to mending saddles. The collection of *argol* used as fuel, in addition to the usual domestic duties and the preparation of *kumiss*, usually falls to the woman's lot. However, she seems to be a power in the *yurt*, of which she is the head until the occupants begin to move their habitation, when she loses her exclusive rights, which she does not recover until the tent is pitched again. Reading and writing are practically unknown among the women and even the men are noticeably deficient in these accomplishments. It is only lamas and student lamas who make any pretention to the acquisition of these arts. They begin their life at the lamasery schools between the ages of eight and ten and remain there until they have passed their examination and are qualified to undertake their religious duties in the temple.

The literary and official language is of course Mongol, but very few of the lamas, who are the scribes of the people, ever study any other script than the Tibetan, so that in many communities one finds scores of professing scholars, who can neither read nor write a word of the Mongol language, and no one who can read enough to spell out an official document. The sons of officials and of wealthy men are taught to read and write Mongol by private tutors; the lamas learn their Tibetan in the monastery schools, while the great mass of the people have no opportunity and little desire to pick up a knowledge of their script anywhere. Had he the inclination, it would be by no means easy for an ordinary herdsman to acquire enough of the written Mongol language to be of any service to him. It is not simple and the Mongols have neither trained nor aggressive minds. The system of writing was borrowed from the Ouigur Turks, who had adapted a syllabic alphabet to their language under the instruction of Nestorian

missionaries in the early middle ages. The basis of Ouigur, Mongol, and Manchu writing is therefore the Syriac script, altered by each people to suit the peculiarities of their language. After the fashion of the Chinese, the characters are written in vertical columns, which begin at the top of the page, but, unlike the Chinese, one reads the successive columns from left to right across the page. The foreigner who wishes to study Mongol without a knowledge of Russian has the greatest difficulty in finding text books in a European language, and is almost driven to go to the Mongols themselves for instruction. It is a throaty language full of harsh gutturals, aspirates, and rolling r's; but it gives one the same impression of vigour and force that the primitive Teutonic languages give, and is not unpleasant to hear.

Somewhere it is written that morality is only a question of geography. From a moral point of view the Mongols are very low in the scale of civilization. The relations between the sexes are free and easy. There is no privacy in married life and adultery is openly practised, apparently without prejudice to either party. The Mongol has one lawful wife, but he may keep as many concubines as his means allow and since husband, wife and concubines occupy the same *yurt*, in which there may also be belated travellers, the situation can be easily imagined. It is only the rich who can afford concubines. I have been obliged to spend nights during my journey through Western Mongolia in *yurts* where three and four men had a common interest in one woman, and notwithstanding this they all appeared to be content with the arrangement. They have no morals and no sense of decency. The common functions of nature are performed openly and publicly by both sexes. The practice of polyandry has its effect upon the birth-rate, while the absence of morals and uncleanly habits foster the growth of disease.

One of the pleasantest and most picturesque features of Mongol life is the horsemanship. It compensates for much that is dirty and sordid and helps largely to retrieve the whole

Mongol race from degradation, both physical and moral. Riding is so intimately bound up with the whole history and life of the Mongols that it must be taken carefully into account in any estimate of the race's past greatness or present mode of life. In their days of conquest the Mongols said that they had no country; their homes were their horses' backs. Horses and men are equally hardy, equally inured to short rations and long journeys, equally adaptable to almost any climate, and whether herding or fighting, know each other so well that any man or beast having occasion to contest with them is at a decided disadvantage.

Both sexes learn to ride soon after they are able to walk, and as their occupation and nomadic habits necessitate their making long and frequent journeys on horseback, they acquire a degree of proficiency seldom equalled by any other people. In consequence of spending most of the day in the saddle they lose the habit of walking, which accounts for the slouching gait observable among the men. This peculiarity is not noticeable among the women, whose occupations keep them more at home.

They are fond of racing, and every year a meeting is held in Urga in which there are thousands of entries from the best stud farms of the country. The jockeys are mostly little boys and girls, and the course is along a very stony valley over the uneven ground leading out of Urga, and several miles in length. Fleetness of foot and endurance are the chief qualities sought after, and a race over such a course is the one best calculated to prove those qualities to the native mind. The winning horse is invariably presented to the Hutukhtu, who is also invited to make a selection from among the others that stayed the course and finished well up with the first past the post. So great is their love of racing that they will invariably ride up to you, and, after running their eyes over the animal you are riding, challenge you to race on the open road. Many a gallop I have enjoyed and seen as a result of these impromptu contests.

Their saddles are made of wood and built much after the style of the Mexican saddle, which, for long distances, is excellent for the horse, seldom causing a sore back; and I have frequently noticed that on long journeys they continually shift their position in the saddle, riding first on one leg and then on the other, thereby relieving the fatigue of sitting in the same position all day. They ride rather short, sometimes standing in the stirrups and throwing the weight well forward to get the best out of their animals.

The heavy whip about two feet long, made of a stout piece of wood, at one end of which there is a strip of partly dressed hide and at the other a loop to attach it to the wrist, is useful to beat off dogs.

The life of the Mongols is a very dull one and only the religious festivals and family feasts break the monotony. The marriage ceremony is rather quaint, especially if it happens to be between wealthy Mongol families. The old custom of seizing the bride and riding off with her does not appear to be in vogue now. The bridegroom must, however, make his father-in-law a present according to his means, which usually consists of cattle, horses and garments.

Attired in her wedding gown, the bride rides up to the bridegroom's *yurt*, where she is welcomed by the women folk arrayed in gorgeous apparel, adorned with silver ornaments. The bride then kneels down and prays to Heaven and Earth, after which she makes an obeisance to every member of the bridegroom's family. In the evening there is a feast, attended by musicians. Rich Mongols often summon from afar famous performers for the ceremony. The following morning the bride pays a formal call upon all her husband's neighbours in the immediate vicinity of the camp and hands to each a kind of silk scarf which it is the custom to present on such occasions.

Funerals are attended with certain rites and ceremonies. The Mongol aristocrat is usually put in a coffin much after Chinese fashion, and accorded a burial attended with great pomp, while those of no particular rank are wrapped in a piece

of cloth and left on a hill named by a priest. Another method is to place the body on an ox-cart and drive the oxen as fast as they can go, so that by the jolting of the cart over the stony and uneven ground the body falls off. The driver dares not look round to see where the body falls lest he should anger the spirit following the corpse, and thereby cause some ill-luck to follow him and his family during their lifetime. The corpse is left where it falls, to be devoured by wolves and dogs and birds of prey, and it is quite a common sight to see the whitening remains of human beings all over the valley of the Tola, picked clean by birds and beasts.

Not very far from Mai Mai Cheng there is what one might describe as a charnel heap, carefully guarded by hundreds of dogs which batten upon the dead. It is dangerous to go near the place at any time unless in a party well armed with whips and fire-arms, for when they are hungry they have been known to attack unwary travellers who have ventured too near. Although a constant source of danger, they serve a very useful purpose, as the Mongols merely throw their dead out on the hillsides and open roads.

Every Mongol habitation has its complement of dogs. They use them for hunting and for guarding the sheep and the *yurt*. The approach of a stranger to a *yurt* is usually announced by the barking of these canine guards, which causes a nervous traveller some moments of uneasiness when he finds himself surrounded by the half savage beasts, intimidating him with vicious attacks, and it is not until the visitor has lustily shouted "*Nohoi, Nohoi,*" and one of the inmates of the *yurt* has come out, seized a whip and has driven the dogs off to a less dangerous distance that the traveller may dismount from his pony without fear of being torn to pieces.

The greatest of all Mongol diversions is the pilgrimage. Every trip to a distant shrine is undertaken as a religious duty, or so every pilgrim would have his fellows understand; but, undoubtedly, the desire to get away from a monotonous and lonely life, to reach some religious and commercial centre,

where there are bustle and traffic, where there are strangers from strange parts to converse with, and where there is fully as much hilarity as piety, inspires many to ride or trudge great distances to popular shrines. Urga is, of course, the Mongol centre, and in every part of Mongolia there are lama temples which are convenient to the neighbouring tribesmen, who can make a brief visit whenever they feel the religious or social call; but the most famous and the greatest pilgrim shrines are in China and Tibet, and Mongols from the most remote corners of Mongolia go as often as they can to such places as Wu T'ai Shan in Shansi, Kumbum and Labrang in Kansu, and Lhassa in Tibet to fulfil vows, see the sights and market whatever merchandise they have.

As the population is scant and distances are great, commerce also entails long journeys and even the purchase of tent necessities often takes the herdsman over many days' ride. Although the Mongols know little of modern means of travel, their long tiresome journeys are lightly undertaken, and are amply balanced by the excitement, merriment, and pious satisfaction that the Mongol finds in a monastic and commercial centre. These same long, hard journeys are not seen in the same light by Europeans.

The means of transport and conveyance at the traveller's disposal are very typical of the country. There is the camel cart, a larger edition of the old Peking cart, used exclusively in North China. Long shafts are attached to this vehicle to permit of harnessing a camel; but the peculiar stride and gait of that beast sets up a motion similar to that experienced on board ship in a choppy sea, and, in consequence of the vehicle itself being springless, the sensation is extremely unpleasant. Chinese traders in crossing the Gobi invariably use these carts, which they pad with cushions and line with skins when the weather is cold. Being accustomed to this cumbersome means of transport they do not experience the ill effects noticed by foreigners who are tempted to travel in this way in the winter. The snug appearance of the interior, with almost sufficient

room to recline at full length, is sufficient inducement to the unwary traveller when the temperature is below zero, but once let him get on the move with the jolting and jarring, jerky movement of the cart, to say nothing of the feeling of numbness and cramp from lying in one position, and he will be glad to get out and walk. I have been obliged on many occasions to travel in these Peking carts over bad roads, and on comparing notes with others who have had similar experiences in China and Mongolia, I have found them declare most emphatically against the use of this vehicle harnessed to a camel for a long journey.

Ox-carts are sometimes employed. They are a kind of two-wheeled trolley with shafts, very rudely constructed. The wheels are unprotected by iron tyres, so that with constant use over stony roads they soon lose their round shape, becoming in turn octagonal, hexagonal, pentagonal, and at this stage the Mongol begins to think that it is time he had new wheels; but before his caravan has reached a place where he can find a Chinese to do what is required, they have passed from the rectangular to the triangular shape and refuse to go any farther. Travel by ox-cart is slow and tedious, the tortures en route increasing with the transformations in the shape of the wheels.

Russian officials and traders when travelling in this country invariably use a *telega* with hired Government horses. A pole is lashed crosswise at the end of the shafts and juts out some four feet each side. Mongol horsemen bring their ponies on both sides, resting this pole across the saddle in front of them. The ponies are not attached in any other way to the *telega* and when the signal is given to start they set off at a sharp trot, soon breaking into a gallop. A more exciting travelling experience than this would be hard to find in any other part of the world. Going down hill at a gallop the Mongol sees no danger and knows no fear; they urge their steeds forward, whipping up the pace, thoroughly entering into the excitement of the ride, while the poor traveller inside, in

a vehicle unharnessed to the horses, is thrown from side to side, expecting every moment to be hurled out headlong and dashed to pieces. Remonstrance with the drivers is futile. The more you scold them, the less notice they take, and it invariably happens that they will take even greater risks if they detect any sign of nervousness. On reaching a relay station, fresh mounts are trotted out and take the place of the tired animals, the *telega* never stopping for the change. There is no pleasure in travelling in this way, as the mind is continually on the alert for mishaps.

The most agreeable and interesting way of travelling in this country is with camels and horses, using the former for transport of baggage and the latter for riding. The camel common to this part of Asia is the variety known as the *Camelus bactrianus*, having two humps and somewhat shorter legs than the variety seen in Egypt. In appearance it is rather clumsy and is remarkable for the abundance of hair and wool in the winter, which grows to a great length, forming a natural protection from the extreme severity of the climate in that season. It displays a marked preference for the bitter plants of the steppes, which other animals refuse, and I have frequently noticed this ungainly quadruped wander off in search of these plants and shrubs in preference to feeding on grass. Another peculiarity is its partiality for salt water, of which it drinks freely at the salt and brackish lakes and springs frequently found in Mongolia.

Of the horse, or rather Mongol pony, the qualities have long been recognized for rough work in severe climates, and there are perhaps few countries like its native habitat, where the extremes of heat and cold call for the particular qualities with which Nature has endowed that hardy beast. Travelling with such animals is a pleasure, and, moreover, a comparatively inexpensive one, since they live on the country and at the end of the journey can be sold. By setting out after sunrise and going till sunset, with a break at midday of a couple of hours, distances varying from 35 to 45 miles, according to the nature

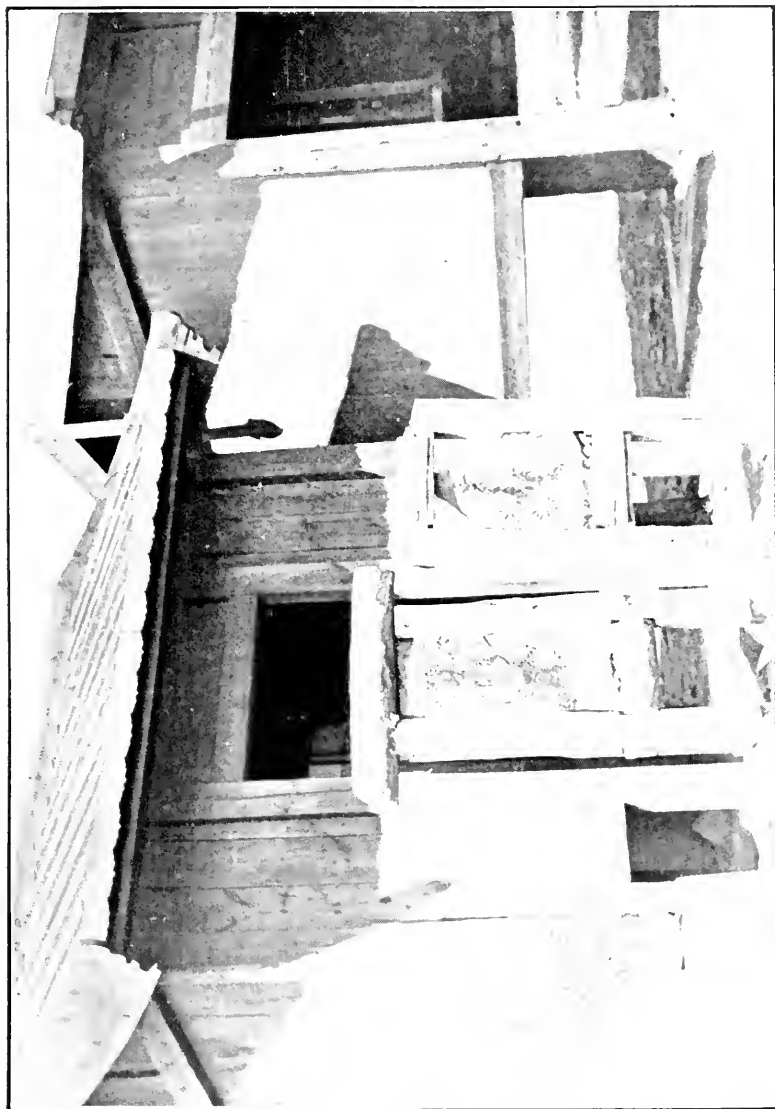
of the country, can be covered daily without unduly fatiguing them. In the hands of an experienced driver who has knowledge of their peculiarities, they keep up a steady pace, covering five miles an hour with ease.

The Mongolian Government maintains stations on the principal routes throughout the country where remounts can be obtained upon payment of one rouble per animal; but to travel over these roads a special permit has to be obtained and presented to the official in charge of the station.

To the traveller not pressed for time, who desires to see something of the country in a less tedious and uncomfortable way than that experienced in any of the vehicles described above, the camel caravan with riding ponies is decidedly preferable.

One of the most striking characteristics of Mongol life is the religious one. In open spaces, and along the main routes, even on mountain passes, there is something symbolizing the religion of the people. Prayer wheels embellished with Tibetan characters in gold, and full of thousands of little slips of paper, upon which is written some prayer or sacred thought, are continuously being turned by devotees who, in going the round of their daily occupations, seldom fail to discharge their religious obligations. From the tops of the palisades enclosing their habitations, little pieces of coloured material about the size of a pocket handkerchief, upon which are written sacred characters, flutter in the breeze, and with every movement of the air automatically add to the store of prayers every devout Mongol is supposed to lay up for himself.

There are sacred stones with bilingual inscriptions, with boards in front of them slightly raised at one end and worn smooth and shiny by the countless prostrations of passers-by. Lamas and pilgrims, journeying from Thibet or some remote part of Mongolia, and entering the city of the third living God of Buddhism for the first time, prostrate themselves at every few steps, beating their foreheads upon the stone-covered ground, thereby acquiring great merit. Round their necks,



attached to a chain or cord and worn next to the skin, is some sacred charm or token placed there at birth, which is believed to have the power to ward off evil.

The mountain passes are crowded with *obos* or cairns, in which are sometimes enshrined the image of Buddha, and which no Mongol worthy of the name would pass unless he performed an act of devotion. The rosary used for religious purposes is in constant use. Whether riding or walking or reclining in their *yurts* they finger the beads mechanically, while their lips move in prayer.

CHAPTER V.

MEMORIES OF URGÄ.

My daily wanderings about the capital in company with Mamen or Lobsenjensen gave me opportunities to observe the manners and customs of the people and their mode of living. We would sometimes stop at a *yurt* and take a bowl of tea with the occupants, observing the usual form of etiquette practised by these people, by exchanging snuff bottles and pretending to take a pinch in conformity with the custom of the country.

Conversation seldom wandered outside a limited range of topics, such as the price of cattle, horses, and sheep, prospects of a good year for grazing the flocks, transport rates to various parts of the country and similar subjects connected with their occupations. They like to gossip about their neighbours and are thoroughly imbued with the *dolce far niente* spirit, for they are never so content as when eating, drinking, sleeping and discussing their neighbours' affairs. They are very suspicious of foreigners and are not backward in asking questions concerning the reason for your being in their country; but their knowledge of the world beyond their own frontiers is very limited and its affairs appear to interest them less.

Any foreigner who is not Chinese is classed as a Russian. Their questions about the number of horses I owned and how rich I was in flocks and herds often caused me to smile, and when they wanted to know whether we had any sheep equal to what I had seen in Mongolia and I tried to describe the points and qualities of our Southdowns, they accepted the statement with reserve.

Lobsenjensen being a small official, was frequently receiving visits from his numerous colleagues, whose curiosity to see the new arrival they could seldom restrain. News in a

small place is soon noised abroad, for travellers other than Russian in this part of Asia are the exception. At midnight on the first day of my arrival we were awakened by a loud knocking at the massive wooden doors of the compound, followed by shouting to open, and on looking into the compound we saw Lobsenjensen in a great state of excitement, with some of his servants hurrying to the doors to learn what all the trouble was about. The doors were unbarred and in came a dozen well-armed, mounted men, with two officials. One was the minister of war, Dalai Wang, and the other was a high lama official. Introductions followed and we sat and drank tea and smoked and conversed till nearly daylight.

As neither Dalai Wang nor his companion could speak Chinese, Lobsenjensen courteously translated their conversation to me in that language. Notwithstanding the lateness of the hour and the fatigue of the journey, I was interested in these people and their ingenuous talk about cattle and horses, and the interest in the political situation in China as manifested in their questions.

Day was just breaking when they took their departure. We saw them disappear in a cloud of dust going at full gallop along the valley towards their encampment.

This nocturnal visit resulted in an invitation to dinner with Dalai Wang. He was encamped about eight miles from where we were living, and on the evening of the invitation he sent us an armed escort to conduct us to his *yurt*. How are galloped along the stony track in the gathering darkness! I thought at times we must surely come down, as we were riding close together; but I underestimated the surefootedness of the Mongol pony. Our guard looked a ruffianly lot of cut throats, armed to the teeth and ready for any emergency. They kept up a cheerful banter all the way and never allowed the pace to slacken.

Arrived at the encampment we were shown to our host's *yurt* where he welcomed us with a Mongol greeting meaning "Have you ridden well." My impression of a Mongol *yurt*

had been gained on the road from Kiachta to Urga, and although I was inclined to think that a minister of war would have something better than the *yurt* one usually sees, I never anticipated such a pleasant surprise as what I saw on entering the prince's abode, and was for the moment quite dazzled by the colour within. Due observance of the elemental and requisite forms of etiquette engaged all my attention for the first few minutes, for I closely followed my host along the left side of the *yurt* to a place near the centre, where cushions were placed upon which we reclined—our feet pointing to the opening of the *yurt*. Our hosts sat facing us. After the usual exchange of snuff bottles and kind inquiries after the health, Mr. Mamen and Lobsenjensen dropped into easy conversation in Mongol, which left me a few moments to look around. The whole colour scheme was in crimson and yellow, with lavish gilt work. Lacquer chests of the same colour were arranged round the *yurt*, while facing the entrance was a fine altar, richly decorated and surmounted by a big gilt Buddha. The light from many candles placed in massive metal candlesticks diffused a soft glow and enhanced the general effect.

Servants were coming and going with various utensils, and when all was ready the viands were brought in, which chiefly consisted of boiled mutton. As we were guests we were offered the fat tail, which is always considered as a great honour. It is regarded by all Mongols as the most delicate part of that animal; but this was all fat and I have since often wondered how I managed to do the polite thing and eat part of it with apparent relish. No sooner had we started than his wife joined us. She, like her husband, was gorgeously attired in a long robe of crimson silk with a wonderful head dress of silver and pearls which reached to her shoulders. She sat opposite to me and plied me with questions and took a keen interest in my clothes and she was curious to see how they fastened. She was a pleasant little lady, full of vivacity and a charm of manner, but, like the others, was very ignorant of the world outside Mongolia.

We drank hot spirits from the daintiest of porcelain cups as thin as eggshells, and our too hospitable hosts would not allow them to remain empty nor the spirits to become cold.

The lama official whom I had met the previous day was there. When not eating or engaged in conversation he filled in the moments of inaction by fingering his rosary, which never left his wrist. Occasionally he would address questions to me such as "Where I was going, how many horses I owned, what sort of grass lands were to be found in my country, or were there any camels in Europe." He had a vague idea of the geographical situation of Europe—but that did not matter. In spite of his ignorance of foreign countries and peoples, I subsequently found that he had an intimate knowledge of the political affairs of his country and was a power in its internal administration.

The remains of the feast were taken out to the retainers and shared among them and this was a sign for the lighting of pipes. Music sounded at intervals throughout the dinner, the Mongols singing very lustily to the accompaniment of native instruments. It was quite a pleasant performance in which they all joined without any shyness, and when I enquired what the song was about, I was told that it related the deeds of the great Ghengiz Khan.

Lying back on the soft cushions amid a scene touched with the barbaric splendour of a bygone age, I found my thoughts wandering unconsciously to the vivid pen pictures of Mongol life as drawn by the immortal Venetian traveller Marco Polo. Here were the remnants of the great Mongol race, once the founders of the mightiest empire of the world, still preserving many of their traditions and customs, but scattered over a vast country and sunk into political insignificance.

It was long past midnight when we took leave of our hosts, and not a moment too soon, for the fumes of the hot spirits and the tobacco smoke began to cloud the brain, which was very noticeable on stepping outside into the clear cold air. Our escort was awaiting with our ponies and soon

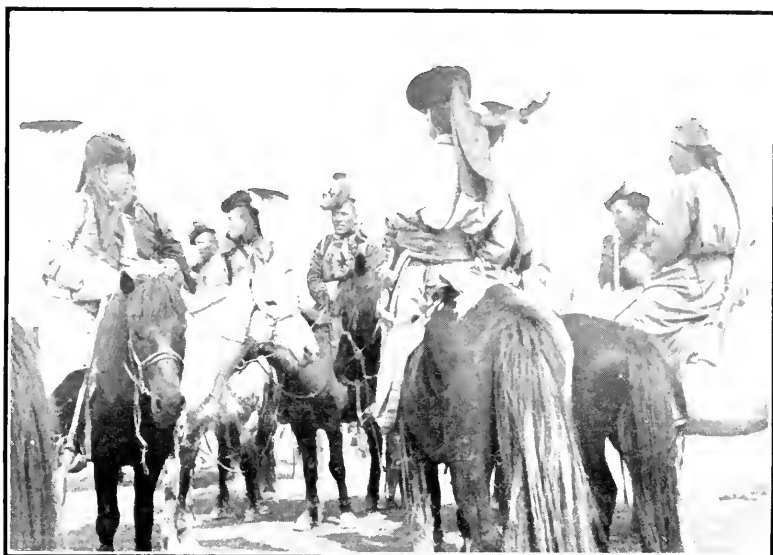
we were racing madly along the valley back to our quarters in Mai-Mai-Cheng.

I had ample opportunity during my sojourn in Urga to see something of the religious life of the people and the ceremonial observances of the lamas. In fact, the mechanical practice of the lamaistic rites was in constant evidence all about me. Feasts are numerous in a temple settlement, Lamas are everywhere, and the religious life is so much part of the Mongol's daily life, that one cannot escape seeing all he cares to of Buddhistic rites. Much of what one sees loses its attraction through constant repetition and becomes irksome rather than interesting. The festivals, however, never fail to bring forth new and interesting features, and many of the daily ceremonies are attractive and have a lasting charm. One of these is the summoning of Buddha to the congregation of the pious.

In the early morning two lamas attired in their yellow and scarlet vestments mount a wooden platform raised some 25-ft. above the ground, and blow a continuous note upon their horns to summon Buddha to the temple, and, incidentally, the faithful to prayer. The sustained note is achieved by the two priests taking up the office of sounding the horn alternately before the breath of either one becomes exhausted.

The Feast of the Maitreya was held early in May and I was afforded an opportunity of witnessing one of the greatest public religious ceremonies in the Buddhistic Calendar. The image of that Saint was carried round in procession attended by priests chanting the litanies. Native musicians with trumpets and drums supplied the musical part of the programme. Mongol princes and officials, decked out in their robes of state and office, rode by in solemn procession, forming a picturesque part of the ceremony. Silken banners of many colours and huge umbrellas, the emblem of loyalty, under which images were carried by lamas, added interest to the scene.

Another interesting feature of the procession was the dress of the Mongol ladies of rank. Well mounted on their hardy



Mongol Princes who attended the Feast of Maitreya

Page 52



Carrying the Image of Buddha at the Feast of Maitreya

Page 53

ponies and beautifully attired in many coloured silks, richly embroidered, their head-dress laden with pearls and heavy silver and gold ornaments, they excited the admiration and wonder of the crowd.

The world and his wife were there to see the image of Buddha carried to the temple. There were vendors of small bronze prayer wheels with the sacred characters of "*Om mane padme hum*," a Tibetan prayer which is constantly being repeated from the Eastern boundary of Mongolia to the remotest lamasery in Tibet. These vendors did a thriving business, while the beggars made the most of their opportunities.

A few days before the Feast of the Maitreya there was another ceremony called the Burning of the *Sawr*. The place selected for this rite is usually in an open space outside a temple. Preparations for a fire are made, with wood built up in conical shape about two feet high. When all is ready the lamas file out of the temple preceded by musicians with brass horns and drums attached to poles, one of the lamas carrying in his hands the *Sawr* or object to be turned. This, on closer inspection, is a pyramidal object, tinted red and made of a kind of dough with holes in it and mounted on a wooden stand. The officiating Lama opens the ceremony, to the chanting of the priests, accompanied by the beating of drums and blowing of horns. Two trumpets 12-ft. long, inlaid with silver and resting on the shoulders of two boys, are sounded by musicians at intervals. When the fire is kindled the high priest approaches with the *Sawr*, making ceremonial signs and finally casting it into the flames, intoning the concluding part of the liturgy while it is being consumed.

In this way a Mongol burns his sins, his enemies, evil spirits and bad luck. If he has a grievance against any one or imagines that some evil spirit is the cause of disease among his cattle, he goes to the temple and pays for the performance of this rite.

The temples are worthy of notice, being built by Chinese and similar in design and appearance to those seen in China. One in particular was commenced a few years ago, when the Hutukhtu was suffering from an eye affection and was almost blind, as an offering to the gods and to appease their wrath. Prayers and supplications were made entreating them to restore his eyesight and it is worthy of note that he has partially recovered it. This temple contains a Buddha in bronze forged at Dolonor, which is approximately 80-ft. high. It is studded with precious stones and is placed on a huge stand, designed like the enfolding petals of the lotus, about 35-ft. in diameter and 6-ft. from the ground. An altar covered with yellow and crimson silk and embellished with massive brass candlesticks faces the ponderous doors, while around the steps of the altar and on the altar itself little metal bowls full of millet are placed as an offering to the gods. Tibetan signs and symbols are cut in the woodwork of the interior and gilded, and when the doors are open admitting the light, the general colour effect is very startling. Over the lintel of the doors are Tibetan inscriptions in gold leaf on a dark blue ground, lending a very ornate appearance to the exterior. Small bronze prayer wheels adorn two of the external walls, which are coloured white, while the upper part of the temple is crowned by a wooden tower, painted red and picked out with gold, at the four corners of which are bells that jingle with every movement of the wind.

There are other temples near by, one in particular recalling the temples one sees in the Mongol quarter in Mukden. The characteristic roof with its long curling eaves and detail work, ornamented with the figures of animals, arouses one's admiration.

Judging by external appearances the Mongol is a very religious person. Even when pursuing his daily occupation he finds time to mumble prayers and perform other acts of religious devotion, but his religion does not improve his morals nor help him to overcome his vices. The lamas are not



A Religious Ceremony of the Lamas—burning a Sin

Page 53



Mongol Soldiers at the Feast of Maitreya

Page 54

supposed to marry, but they make no attempt to conceal their intimate relations with the opposite sex, for women are always to be found near the lamaseries. In consequence of this it is not to be wondered that the lay population has a very, very low standard of morals.

From a missionary point of view Mongolia offers a wide field, but reports on mission work during the last decade indicate very clearly what an unshakeable hold Buddhism has upon the native mind.

Within the last decade a missionary came to Urgа and made a very bold attempt to gain converts. He spoke the Mongolian language, dressed as a lama, and went from *yurt* to *yurt*, endeavouring to gain the attention of the people. He would occasionally take up a prominent position in the market place and expound the doctrine of Christianity ; but he made no converts. Occasionally the lamas would invite him to argue with them ; but he left them unconvinced. In the end he gave up the task in despair ; but left his religious literature behind. One day when talking to a Chinese bootmaker I saw a pile of pamphlets and asked him what they were and he replied that they were the books of a "missionary man." He had collected as many as he could find about the place, as he said they made excellent padding for the soles of Mongol boots.

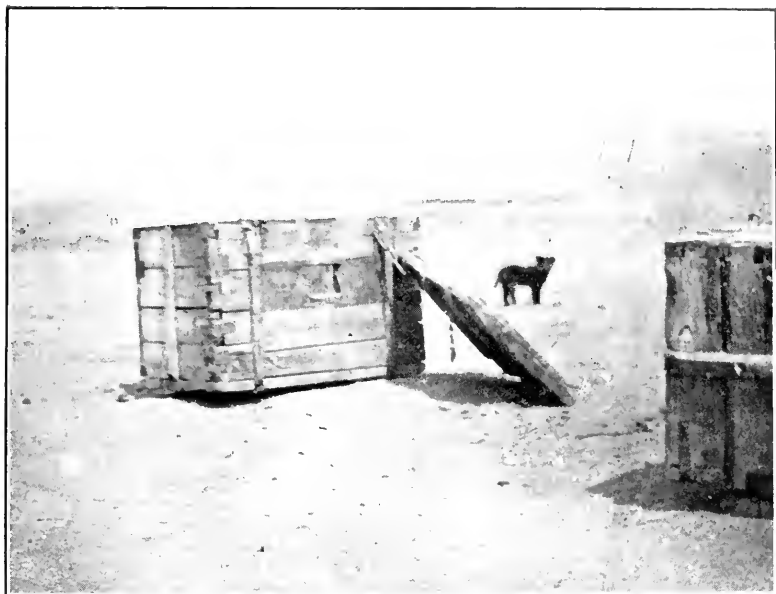
One building never failed to attract my attention whenever I passed it and that was the prison. Nowadays when so much is written about prisons and prison life, and many kindly disposed people interest themselves in the welfare of criminals to a point of sentimental devotion, providing for their comfort and recreation, the following description may be of interest. I persuaded Lobsenjensen to obtain permission for me to visit it, although he tried to dissuade me. It was constructed by the Chinese and is an eloquent tribute to that nation whose knowledge of the refined arts of cruelty has never been excelled. A more barbarous form of punishment and treatment than that meted out to the poor, unfortunate inmates of that

government jail, so cunningly planned and devised, cannot be imagined.

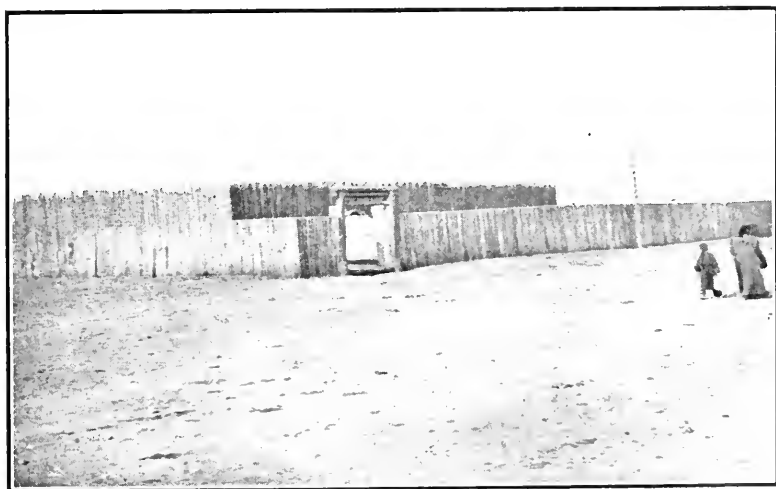
Under the Manchu regime when the Chinese were in the zenith of their power, they had this prison built for criminals and offenders. It is a rectangular building formed by the stems of trees spiked at the top and driven in the ground side by side, forming a kind of high palisade. Passing through this to another inner palisade similarly constructed, the jailer opens a door leading into an open space about 10 feet square, around the wooden walls of which are the doors to the cells in which there are small holes to admit a few rays of light.

Unlocking the door of one of these dungeons, one sees as soon as the eyes become accustomed to the gloom, boxes about 4-ft. long and $2\frac{1}{2}$ -ft. high, placed round the walls and piled up two high. Inside these boxes are the prisoners, mostly murderers and political offenders. A square hole large enough to enable them to put their heads through is cut in the side of the box. Chained and manacled, unable to sit up straight or lie at full length, these unhappy creatures are obliged to spend their lives in this torture chamber amid surroundings that simply beggar description.

There is a small opening in the roof to admit light and—incidentally—a little fresh air, but the stench from the insanitary conditions is simply overpowering when the door is opened. Their unkempt appearance and yellow faces present a most pitiable sight in their foul surroundings. Some, I ascertained, had been imprisoned in these boxes many years, while others had only been there months. There was one comparatively young Chinese who had spent five years there, and owing to his particular crime had no hope of ever being released. He was secured by a chain attached to an iron collar round his neck and the box locked so that escape was impossible. They are allowed out for a few minutes every day if the gaoler does not forget; but the long confinement in these iron-bound cases in small crowded cells soon tells upon them and they lose the use of their limbs after a while.



A Living Tomb in which the Mongol Lawbreaker is Immured



The Prison House at Urga from which the above tomb was taken

There were others in another part of the prison shut up in cells opening out upon the inner courtyard, but they were not chained nor confined to boxes, and were allowed a few hours exercise every day and might see their friends. I ventured to ask what happens in the winter, which it is extremely cold in this part of Asia, and was told that beyond giving them a sheepskin no means are taken to alleviate their suffering from the extreme rigours of the climate at that season of the year.

They asked for cigarettes with which I had fortunately provided myself and which they enjoyed. What struck me most after recovering from the unpleasant shock I experienced on seeing the heads thrust out of the boxes, was the apparent cheerfulness of the occupants, who asked many questions as to what was happening in China, a country they never hoped to see again.

Under the Manchu regime the Chinese treated the Mongols as very inferior beings and practised cruelties upon them for the smallest offences, but after the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty and the successful struggle which culminated in the independence of Outer Mongolia, Santo, the last Manchu *Amban* at Urga, fled to Siberia and only just escaped with his life. Being mindful of the lessons in cruelty and torture they had learnt so well from their Chinese masters, they retained this institution for their aggressors and lost no time in paying off old scores. One leaves this place with many misgivings, but not without the hope that the Russians will use their influence and induce the Mongol Government to abolish so barbarous and inhuman a relic of the Middle Ages.

The time spent in Urga passed very pleasantly, for, in addition to the daily rambles in and about the capital, there was a social side to life in this unique place that could not be neglected. Easter came and was celebrated by the Russian community in the orthodox way. There were calls to be made upon the officials and the commercial community, and an almost unbroken round of dinners at various houses during the

14 days the festival was celebrated. Never shall I forget the scene outside the little Church in the Consulate compound on Easter morning when, after the service, the congregation came out with the joyful greeting on their lips "*Christos Voskres!*" and embraced their friends.

Of the non-Russian community Mr. and Mrs. Langebaek, Henningsen, Mamen, and I were the only representatives. With the exception of Mamen, who has since left, we were all birds of passage. The Langebaeks had not long before my arrival returned to Urga. Langebaek had been stationed at Tuerin, some 250 miles south of the Capital, on official business. I admired Mrs. Langebaek for her courage in sharing that lonely post in the cheerless Gobi. They were contemplating a return to Tientsin with no uncertain feelings of joy after being cut off from the mixed pleasures of civilized society so long. Many were our pleasant daily reunions in their little log cabin, where we revived the game of bridge and sat talking until long into the night of our approaching departure. They finally settled with some Russian drivers to convey them to Kiachta; from there they hoped to travel to Verkhne-Udinsk by river as by the time of their arrival at Kiachta the Selenga would be open to navigation. They left early one morning near the end of May. Mamen and I were there to see them off and we accompanied them part of the way.

I had now been more than a month in Urga, during which time I endeavoured to form some idea of the life of the natives in this somewhat unique part of Asia, and had gathered all the information obtainable from Russian traders and Mongols whose business had taken them into that part of the country through which I intended to travel. The reports were not very encouraging, since, owing to the lack of rain, the wells had in many places run dry and the pasture was so poor that many thousand head of cattle were reported to be dying daily. Moreover, a disease had broken out among the camels, and prices for sound beasts were comparatively high. In normal times a good camel can be obtained for fifty roubles or

so, but the dealers, at the time of which I am writing, were asking as much as eighty and ninety. Several efforts to find a camel-owner willing to convey me to Uliassutai were also ineffectual, and in two cases where I found men disposed to undertake the journey, their demands were so excessive that I found the beasts could be bought outright for very little more than they asked for their hire. There were also many alarming reports of forest and prairie fires, and I had on several occasions during my brief sojourn in Urga seen the Eastern mountains of the Tola valley ablaze. It was not under the best conditions that I began making preparations for the western journey, and, had I listened to the advice of some of my Russian acquaintances in Urga, it would not have been undertaken.

However, through the kindness of two Russian traders, I got in touch with a lama who expressed his willingness to convey me to Uliassutai, and who, if the condition of the country permitted, was to continue the journey to Kobdo, but after discussing the cost of transport, I found that he was under the impression that I would be willing to pay anything he demanded. He pointed out all the difficulties and risks, and the necessity for taking a couple of spare camels in case of losing any on the way in consequence of the drought, which impressed me greatly but left me undecided. On the following day he returned again, this time offering to sell the camels; but not knowing anything about that animal, I enlisted the services of a Mongol in the employ of Mr. Mamen, whose knowledge in this all-important matter was a very desirable acquisition. I would mention that Mr. Mamen was also travelling west and we arranged to join forces and travel together. He had, however, never been west of Urga before, and, as this journey was to be through part of the country with which he was as unacquainted as I, the new experience was anticipated with considerable pleasure.

The camels were brought into the compound where I was staying and Mr. Mamen's Mongol opened the negotiations,

as we thought it wiser to leave this delicate business to him and not to interfere. He made a close inspection of the beasts—a shaggy lot they looked, with their wool hanging here and there in patches—calling attention to their defects, while the owner extolled their good points, warranting them sound and capable of carrying us to our destination without mishap. The driver in the employ of the lama was a native of Kobdo and he did all in his power to support his master's claims to the virtues these worthy beasts were supposed to possess. After a thorough inspection had been made, in which we were also aided by the sound advice of Lobsenjensen, his wife, and servants, to say nothing of the interest our Chinese servants evinced in the proceedings, we all repaired to our quarters where tea was served and cigarettes handed round, preparatory to the all important process of opening the negotiations.

The Mongols have a way of bargaining which is practised among all the Tartar peoples. An intending purchaser clasps the right hand of the dealer and conveys to him what price he is willing to pay by exerting digital pressure—the number of times it is repeated represents, according to local custom, the extent of the offer. There may be a crowd of curious witnesses, but dealers and prospective buyer alone know what bids are made as the long ample sleeves of their coats hide their clasped hands.

The lama and his men went into a corner of the room, conversing in low tones, and then commenced to put their ideas into figures in the manner described above, until they finally reached an understanding. This completed, they came forward and partook of tea, which was a sign that they were ready to consider offers. We estimated that we should want between us, for transport of camp impedimenta and servants, five camels; and these, added to the four saddle ponies already bought, were, we thought, sufficient for our needs. Our Mongol waited for them to open the subject, for in all these matters of bargaining with natives time is no object, and it is not policy to appear to be in a hurry to close a deal. To the

Mongol as to the Chinaman, time is not money, but a necessary factor in the successful conclusion of a bargain. The Mongol is not to be hurried. Undue haste arouses his suspicion and leads him to think that he will get a better price by waiting.

The tea-cups were never allowed to remain empty, for no sooner were the contents emptied than fresh tea was brought. I think I drank more of that beverage during these negotiations than I had ever drunk before at one sitting, but as the queer proceedings seemed to be progressing favourably and reaching a more or less satisfactory result, we had no cause to complain. After frequent private discussions in the corner of the room between the Lama and his man, they finally agreed to accept the offer made, greatly to our satisfaction, as we were somewhat weary of the never-ending comments on the good points of the animals. During these conversations the lama was continually fingering his beads while he lent an ear to the arguments of his driver, and when he came to reckon up the total cost he employed his rosary to make the addition, in the same manner that children in a kindergarten learn to count with an abacus.

The lama's camel driver, seeing his occupation vanish with the sale of the animals, offered his services for the journey, saying that he knew the tracks well, all the good grazing grounds, and also that part of the country where we might expect to encounter cattle thieves. We also learnt in further conversation with him that he had been a soldier and had taken an active part in the siege of Kobdo when the Mongols threw off the Manchu yoke and declared their independence. In fact he was one of the first to enter that town and had been awarded a button for conspicuous bravery. As we needed another Mongol, we decided to take him to look after the camels and make himself generally useful.

On the following day our lama friend returned with an offer of two more camels at the same price, as he thought we might require spare animals in case of a mishap. We

thought, however, that we should not need them, so refused the offer. The weather being fine and day breaking about half-past three, we lost no time in bundling our miscellaneous baggage into convenient packages for loading on the camels. Our little driver busied himself with hobbles and nose pins, to which a cord is fastened to connect the camels with each other. We had a rehearsal with the tent which worked satisfactorily. We also bought a Mongol travelling tent for our servants and finally put everything in position in the spacious compound where we were living, ready for the camels when they arrived. Those who have travelled off the beaten track can realize what is required in fitting out a small caravan. Tinned provisions, flour, cooking utensils, water casks, guns, ammunition, and skin clothing, also a few bags of oats for the ponies, have to be packed and arranged in easily accessible places in order that the work involved during the temporary halts may be reduced to a minimum.

There was a storm during the night but very little rain fell, much to our disappointment. The following morning we were up before sunrise. Our Chinese boys and Mongols were very busily employed, and evidently in high spirits, judging by the way they tackled their respective tasks. It may not be out of place to give some idea of the composition of the little caravan, since we were to keep together for some part of the way. Mr. Mamen's cook, a most efficient and worthy fellow, had been trained in a French Mission in North China and was quite familiar with all the tricks of the culinary art. He had accompanied his master across the Gobi desert in the depth of winter and could turn his hand to almost anything on occasion. There was also my companion's house boy, a Chinese Mohammedan, who so far had proved himself a most valuable servant, and willing to go anywhere. Mr. Mamen's Mongol mafoo, experienced in horses and camels, was a good traveller, having made pilgrimages to some of the principal lamaseries in the west, and last but not least, our newly engaged driver, who added

to the usual qualifications Mongols enjoy for horsemanship, the reputation of being a traveller and a good shot.

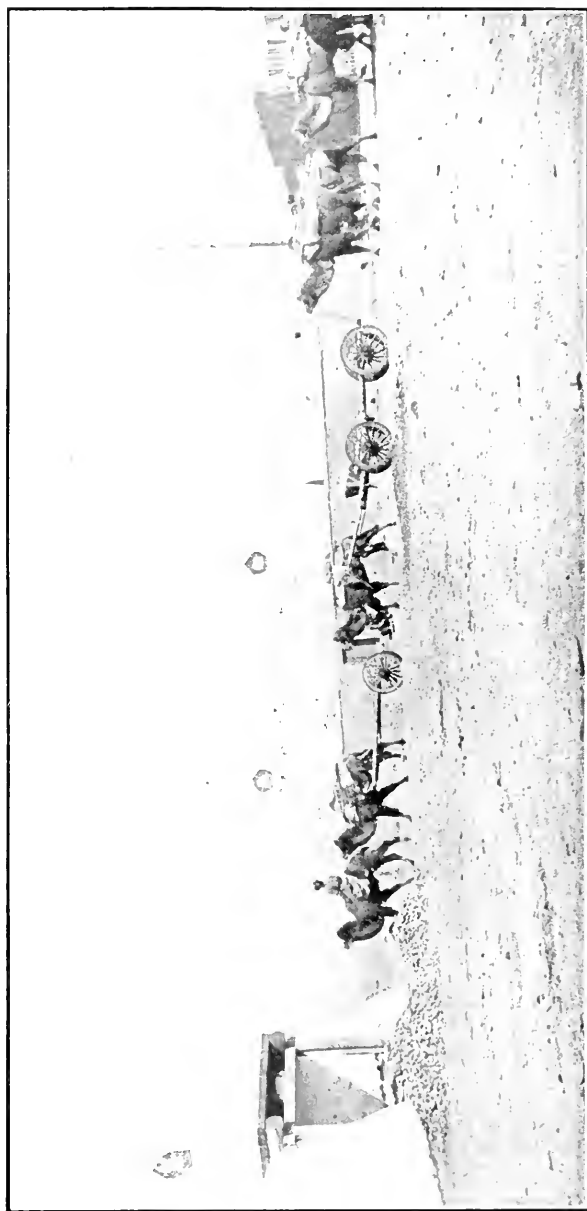
Notwithstanding the somewhat alarming reports on the condition of the country that continued to reach our ears from Mongols arriving from the west, we felt that with such excellent native companions we should fare as well as circumstances permitted. Since each man had his work allotted to him, the task of selecting the necessary things was considerably lightened.

CHAPTER VI.

OFF FOR THE WEST.

On the day we had fixed for our departure, Lobsenjensen was hammering at our door before daybreak. A glance in the compound revealed the fact that everything was in readiness for the camels, which were out in the valley with the ponies, in charge of the little driver. At eight o'clock they were brought in to be loaded. A crowd of interested Mongols, mostly lamas from a temple near by, having heard that we were leaving Mai Mai Cheng, came to give us their best wishes for the journey. To the loud and repeated cries of "tsok! tsok! tsok!" which in this part of the world has the effect of bringing a camel to the ground in a position to load, we managed to get them into their places. It did not take long to perceive that we had too much baggage for five camels, and we began to regret not having listened to the advice of our lama friend who had so strongly recommended buying two more. Lobsenjensen lost no time in going in search of him, but, there being a religious festival, found that he had gone to the temple, and it was not known whether he would be prepared to come to terms that day.

We began to have serious doubts about getting away, and as by mid-day there were no signs of our Mongol host with the additional beasts, we were beginning to realize that we should not be able to leave Urga as arranged. By six o'clock, after waiting and chafing inwardly at receiving no news, Lobsenjensen and the lama arrived with the two camels, greatly to our delight. It was then too late to start, although it is not unusual for caravans to leave in the evening, especially if the moon is up. The next morning broke fine and clear. There was not a cloud in the sky, although we had been hoping it



Lama Tombs containing the Ashes of Saints

would rain in view of the poor condition of the country. Even with the two extra animals and the redistribution of the packs, we had barely enough beasts of burden. Our Mongol neighbours assembled again in great force and were ready with offers of assistance, which, however well meant, became rather embarrassing and led to some confusion.

By 8.30 we were ready to start, and, having got the camels on their legs, they were driven out of the compound, where a halt was made to join them up to each other in Indian file, a line from the nose pin of each being fastened lightly to the load of the camel in front. Some amusement was caused by the Chinese servants in mounting. My boy, who had never been on a camel before, did not seem particularly pleased at the prospect and said he preferred to walk, thinking no doubt of the tales he had heard of the effects of riding caused by the stride of that ungainly beast. However, when he saw his two compatriots more or less comfortably settled, he changed his mind. We fixed the Union Jack to the load of the first camel, and with all the good wishes of our Mongol friends, our little caravan slowly filed out of Mai Mai Cheng and headed for the lower road, through the valley, led by our guides on horseback.

My travelling companion and I did not leave immediately, as we had to take tea with Lobsenjensen and smoke a last pipe with him before setting out on our westward journey. Two hours later we left Mai Mai Cheng, our caravan having had a good start, and we rode into Urga to pay a farewell visit to some Russian traders who had been very kind to us. It was not until after two o'clock that we were able to get away, so that our caravan was some six hours ahead, and had, by this time, covered at least 24 miles. There was a noticeable change in the weather; the valley seemed to be enveloped in a mist. A strong wind was blowing with increasing violence, and clouds of dust were moving about the valley. Fortunately we had provided ourselves with goggles, otherwise we should not have been able to set out in pursuit of our party. My hat

was blown off and I gave chase to it. It rolled along the ground faster than my pony could go at a gallop, and it was not until I had followed it some two miles that I was able to recover it. This little incident afforded much amusement to my companion, who said that if Pathé Frères could have taken a film of that chase, it would have done considerable credit to their collection of comic pictures.

This little unrehearsed incident at the outset of our journey helped us for the time to forget the dust storm, and put us in a good humour. We picked up the track again and headed for the western pass. The wind was now blowing with the fury of a gale, and the clouds of dust rendered the going very slow and uncomfortable. We estimated that by this time our guides had run for shelter from the storm and had pitched camp for the rest of the day. An hour later we were glad to observe an improvement in the weather; the wind was blowing with less violence and the dust was not so troublesome as before. We slowed up to look around, thinking we had gone too far and endeavouring to get some idea of our whereabouts. There are several tracks through the valley, and, as we had been off the main route several times, it was possible we had picked up the wrong one. The wind by this time had died down, and we were able to see ahead, although the air was full of very fine dust which gave the valley the appearance of being full of a thin white mist. There was no sign of our caravan. Had we out-distanced it? Had we borne too much off the track? These questions were constantly recurring in our minds, as we scoured the country with field glasses. At last my companion caught sight of smoke rising in the distance and we set off in that direction. To our delight, we found our camp already pitched and the evening meal in course of preparation, and as we were both very tired with the exertions of the day, we had no sooner unsaddled and hobbled our mounts than we indulged in a well-earned rest.

The spot where our camp was pitched was delightfully sheltered on the north side of the valley at the foot of some

hills rising sharply from the plain. A stream of clear water flowed near by and grass was growing in abundance all round. The storm had now completely passed away and there was a perfectly calm atmosphere. Cattle and horses were grazing on the banks of the stream and a few hundred yards further from our halting place was encamped a Mongol, who had been obliged to take shelter.

Upon enquiring the name of the place where we had pitched our first camp, the Mongol said it was San Geen, one of the few names I was able to find on the map I had with me. It is a favourite spot with caravans going west, as it is within easy distance of the capital and the pasture land is invariably good even in the dry season.

There was a fine sunset. The flood of golden light seemed to enter the valley by the western pass and transform every object into a thing of beauty. From a rocky height behind our camp we could plainly see some of the temples in Urga bathed in the rays of the setting sun, and here and there Tola looked like a river of molten fire as it caught the ruddy glow from the western sky.

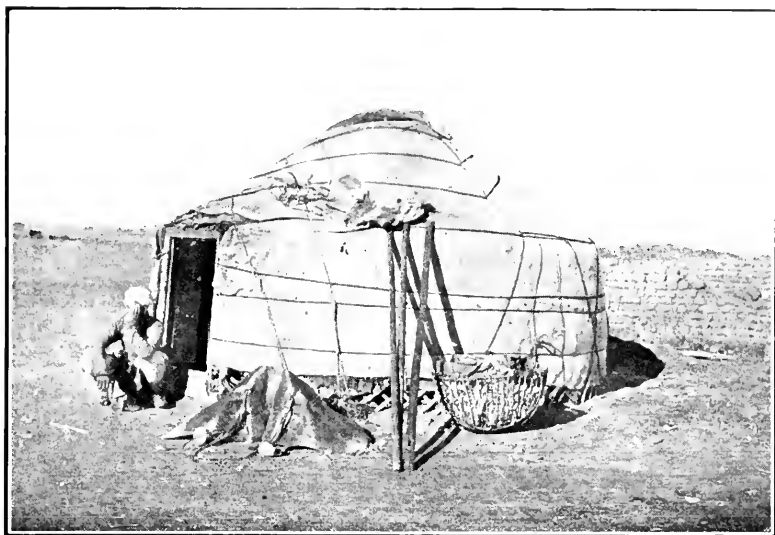
After the evening meal, we had a consultation with the Mongols as to our plans for the morrow. It was decided to make an early start, in order to cover a good distance before the sun rendered the going unpleasant, and also to enable us to reach a certain camping ground, where, according to a report of some natives who had just arrived from the west, good grass and water were to be found. Our camels and ponies were brought in, the camels tethered to a line running between the two tents and fastened in the ground by means of iron pegs. The ponies were hobbled and tethered behind the camels, thus making the camp very compact and enabling our guides to keep a close watch over our belongings.

We had a look round before turning in. The night was very calm and peaceful, broken only occasionally by the hoarse barking of our Mongol neighbour's watch dogs. The camels were quietly munching and looked very content tied up side

by side. Our servants' tent was open and I could see them squatting on the ground round the *argol* fire, over which was a large iron pan of tea. I saw their faces lighted up by the glow of the fire and heard the buzz of conversation as they discussed the events of the day and the prospects of the morrow.

We had not turned in more than an hour when we were awakened by someone walking outside the tent, and we thought, at first, that we had a visit from cattle thieves. Cautiously stepping outside, with guns loaded and cocked, we were prepared to give any marauders a warm reception; but instead of encountering cattle thieves we only found our little Mongol driver keeping watch over the camp and muttering prayers to while away the time. After this we were not disturbed until next morning, when we were aroused by Wong bringing in the breakfast and telling us that they were nearly ready to start.

There was a fine sunrise, and as we ascended to the western pass, the principal buildings in Urga were plainly discernable. Two roads lead out of the Tola valley branching off in the shape of a "V" at the foot of a fairly steep hill, the one to the left being invariably used by Government officials, the one on the right by caravans. We took the latter and reached the top of the pass, where a halt was made to give the animals a rest and enable us to take a last look at the sacred city before descending into the valley on the other side. From this distance very little but conspicuous temples could be seen, but we had a fine view of the country we had traversed. Here and there dotted about the valley were Mongol *yurts*, with blue smoke rising languidly through the openings in the tops, and looking more like smouldering haystacks than human habitations. The country to the west was very barren. There appeared to be little vegetation, except on the north side of the mountain slopes. From our point of view, we could see little else but summits and peaks rising everywhere in confusion. Descending into the neigh-



Mongol Yurt



A Midday Bivouac in the Desert

bouring valley by a sharp stony defile which tried our camels very much, we had to stop and readjust the loads before proceeding further. The road now began to show signs of improvement, although the soil was sandy and the grass thin and poor.

At mid-day we halted in a fine spot where the grass was plentiful and water easily obtainable from a stream running through the valley. There was a big herd of ponies grazing in the pasture land in charge of a couple of Mongols who seemed, on our approach, to pay more attention to us than to their charges, for they rode up and put a number of questions to our guides while they were hobbling our animals before turning them loose to feed. We made an attempt at fixing up a sort of shelter from the sun by stacking up our baggage; but it was unsuccessful. The natives, however, did not seem to mind it. The cook, evidently anticipating cold weather, and not wishing to be caught unawares, had dressed himself in sheepskin clothing early in the morning; but I noticed that he was glad of the halt to get into lighter things. What with the heat and a fairly substantial meal, we soon felt the desire to sleep; but were prevented from indulging in a siesta by the swarms of flies, which greatly tormented us. They were twice the size of the ordinary fly and were very vicious.

After resting about three hours, a move was made to get the caravan together again. The camels had scattered in all directions, one having wandered off in search of a kind of scrubby grass which grows in tufts and patches on the side of the hills in this neighbourhood. Our horses were mixed up with the herd, but we had no difficulty in catching them as they were hobbled. By four o'clock we were ready to proceed. The ponies turned their heads longingly to the east and showed a strong disinclination to go west. We soon entered that part of the country where the marmot is to be found in large numbers. The ground for miles around was full of burrows and holes which are particularly dangerous

when riding at night. I saw the little brown fellows bobbing up from their burrows and sitting up on their hind legs, glancing inquisitively about them. My companion and I made several attempts to get within easy range of them, and succeeded once; but, before we could fire, they had disappeared. This animal is eagerly sought after by the Mongols, who obtain from fifty to sixty *kopecks* a piece for the skins, which are used very extensively in Siberia and Manchuria for the linings of cheap coats. It is said that the pneumonic plague was brought into Manchuria by this animal.

The camels had by now settled down to a pretty even pace, led by our little driver, who, when not mumbling prayers, would succumb to the warmth of the sun and doze, almost falling from his seat. I sometimes rode a few paces behind him while he nodded in the saddle, and when his pony realized that he was asleep it would slacken pace, and the little driver would awaken with a start and give vent to a terrific yell sending the caravan along at a lively pace again. Occasionally a camel would lag behind and become disconnected. This caused a few minutes delay while the tardy beast was being brought into line again and the journey resumed. The Chinese servants had a good time and travelled in comparative comfort. They had arranged their skin covers and sleeping bags so skilfully as to be able to lie with legs hanging down from the knee and were kept from rolling off by the baggage on both sides of the saddle. We were now nearing the end of the second day and I was gratified to find that notwithstanding the many hours spent on horseback, I felt no ill-effects. This was no doubt due to the constant riding I had during my stay in Urga, which was without doubt a very good training for the journey. Towards sunset, one of the Mongols rode in advance of the caravan to look for a suitable place to camp for the night. The country about us did not look very promising, and it was not until some two hours after sunset that we came to a halt at a small, thinly-covered spot a little out of the main track.

The next morning we got away before our caravan, although I would gladly have remained a few hours longer asleep. We followed a well-defined camel track through undulating country, bounded by low hills very sparsely wooded. There was plenty of game, hares, ducks, geese and a prettily marked bird called the lama duck, common to this part of Asia. We also saw for the first time since leaving Urga a big herd of antelopes grazing in a valley; but the wind being from our direction and the country affording so little cover, they were off before we were able to get within rifle range of them. At mid-day, or thereabouts, for the sun was very high, we arrived at Sagannor, or White Lake, which in reality is only a fairly large pond of greenish water, very shallow and dirty. It was good enough, however, in the absence of anything better, to replenish our casks with, and although after boiling it gave a distinct flavour to the tea, we had little cause for complaint since we experienced no ill-effects. We were glad of this opportunity to camp near some water to have a general clean up, and, after having satisfied the inner man, all hands set to washing and cleaning, while our Chinese mutually performed the functions of barbers, much to their evident enjoyment. The country now began to show signs of improvement. In the distance we could see large herds of cattle and horses grazing in the well-watered valley, while here and there we caught sight of Mongol habitations dotted about the landscape. Our guides drew our attention to the mountains closing in the valley to the west, and informed us that we were now approaching the Tola at the point where it turns on its northern course and that we were to camp there that night.

I noticed, during the mid-day halt, quite a number of kites. They sat at a respectful distance from our camp at first; but after a while ventured almost to within ten yards, waiting patiently for the remains of our meal. As we proceeded, we observed them in great numbers, which was easily explained by the bleaching bones of cattle lining the

track. There were also vultures, easily distinguishable by their featherless heads and necks. We got within range of a bustard by creeping through the long grass, and brought down a fine specimen which made a most delightful addition to the larder.

As we approached the Tola, we noticed that the valley at that end was fairly well inhabited. Occasionally the natives would ride up and make inquiries as to who we were, where we were going, and ply us with innumerable questions about the capital, all of which we answered, or at least attempted to answer, to their satisfaction. They paid a lot of attention to my saddle, which had certain points of resemblance with their own, and they were not backward in making a request to try it.

They gave us a lot of useful information about the country, such as where to camp, which tracks to take, what to avoid, and the best spot for fording the river, for which we were very grateful. By the time the sun was beginning to sink behind the western mountains, we were within a short distance of the Tola, which we could plainly see from the elevated track we were following on the north side of the valley. We were riding on in silence, keeping well together and feeling tired and hungry. I was a few yards ahead of the leading camel, when suddenly my pony started, pricked up his ears, and came to a halt. I looked ahead and saw what appeared to be a large dog coming from some boulders on the right of the track and crossing about twenty yards ahead of me. The Mongol guides also saw it, and knowing it to be a wolf, stopped the caravan while my companion, who was carrying an old Russian rifle on his back, immediately dismounted, took aim and fired. By that time the wolf, scenting danger, had darted off into the long grass, and Mamen, being uncertain of the distance in the failing light, fired again without success. It did not break cover until well away in the dip of the valley, and then it was too far off to hit even under favourable conditions. It was the

first wolf I had seen in Mongolia, and, had I been alive to the opportunity, I might have got it with a shot gun, since it passed at walking pace very close to me. We reached the Tola and, selecting a favourable spot, forded the river without difficulty, the water being low and the current weak in consequence of the lack of rain. The depth of the river at this ford was such that it came over the girths of the camels. The bed of the river was stony and there were some pretty big boulders here and there, so that care had to be taken in picking one's way across, even with so sure-footed an animal as a Mongol pony.

By the time we had selected a favourable spot to camp, darkness had already closed in upon us, which seemed to be intensified by the mountains behind. Hungry and tired with the fatigues of the long, hot day, we fell to work with a will to put our house in order, and soon we were snugly made fast, and I was able to get at my notebook, in which I made a practice of recording a few impressions of the country through which we were travelling. It was an ideal place for camping, with an abundance of grass and water only a few yards from the river, whose gentle waters struck a plaintive note on the still night air. Occasionally the barking of dogs sounded away in the distance, and, but for that and the soft murmur of the Tola near by, nothing disturbed the stillness of the night.

A good watch was kept until daybreak, as it was thought that we might have a visit from wolves, but fortunately we were not disturbed. At sunrise we heard voices coming from the direction of the river, and, looking out, saw a bullock caravan in the charge of Chinese in the act of crossing. We watched it as it cautiously picked its way through the ford, the way being led by a Mongol woman who evidently acted as guide. They were Chinese traders going to Sainshabi and Uliassutai with merchandise to barter for native produce, and had camped on the eastern bank of the Tola the previous night, having feared to cross the river in the darkness.

We broke camp, not without some feelings of regret, for the reports on the country ahead of us were far from encouraging. Slowly ascending the trail out of the valley, we came upon country that was sandy and very barren. As the day wore on the heat was troublesome and tried our animals sorely, and, having reached the top of the pass, we descended by easy gradients into a barren region utterly devoid of vegetation. Broad sweeping valleys with patches of desert scrub here and there, flanked by low hills presenting from the distance the appearance of sand dunes, characterized the country through which we were travelling at this stage. We occasionally caught sight of antelopes on the move; but there was no cover to enable us to get within range. We had filled our small water casks before leaving that day, and counted upon finding water holes for the animals; but the few we found had run dry, and we were obliged to push on in the hope of obtaining water in the next valley. There was a very noticeable change in the temperature which had fallen considerably. The sky became overcast and the wind began to blow with increasing force, raising clouds of sand similar to those experienced outside Urga.

We had now entered a very narrow valley which seemed to imprison all the fury of the storm, and it was with the greatest difficulty that we managed to keep our caravan together. Laboriously ascending the other side we reached a high plateau where we encountered some Mongols on the way from Uliassutai to the capital. Here a temporary halt was made while we exchanged greetings and made inquiries about the route and the prospects of finding water. Having obtained the information we needed, we pushed on, and about 6 o'clock arrived at a place called by the natives Haranuttени-hottok, meaning "Black Eye Well." There was a caravan encamped a few hundred yards away from the well in charge of two Mongols. We were very glad to find this water hole, and although it was very dirty, it was nevertheless quite palatable when boiled. I tried afterwards to find the name

of this place on the map, in order to have some idea of the distance from Urga ; but it was not there. In fact, apart from the names of the principal places such as Urga, Uliassutai and Kobdo, and the names of some of the larger rivers, our Mongols did not recognize any of the other places mentioned to them when consulting them about the route.

We had been in the saddle about 12 hours without a break and naturally welcomed the opportunity to take a long rest before setting out again next morning. That evening our Mongol neighbours, who were camel drivers, paid us a visit, prompted greatly by curiosity, to examine our camp and find out all about us. They first visited our servants, and we could hear them plying them with questions about us, and having partaken of tea and some boiled mutton, the staple food of Mongolia, they came over to our tent and greeted us after the manner of the country. They told us they had come from Uliassutai, and that out of an original caravan of 25 camels they had lost ten on the journey, owing to the poor state of the grazing grounds a few days east of Uliassutai. The account of their experiences was not very cheering, but we were nevertheless very glad of the information they gave about the water holes and where to find them.

CHAPTER VII.

THROUGH THE KARAKORUM COUNTRY.

We broke camp an hour or so after sunrise next morning, and halted at midnight at a place called Bolok Holching. There was no change in the general features of the country, which were rather monotonous; but by way of compensation we had a fairly busy day with our guns, making substantial additions to our stores, of ten hares, two fine bustards, and last, but not least, an antelope—the first secured on the trip—which fell to the honour of my companion. He managed to get good cover on a high ridge overlooking a plain on which a herd was browsing, while I manœuvred to get to the windward of them with the object of starting them in his direction. The move was successful, for they scented me and made off, coming close within his range, and he brought down his quarry with the first shot. We now had a good supply of fresh meat, sufficient to last several days, and as the weather was rather hot during the day, we had to devise means of keeping our meat supply, which we successfully did by wrapping it in canvas.

We were, as we knew, entering the historic Karakorum district, which was made famous in mediaeval Europe by the accounts given by early travellers of the capital of the Mongol Khans and of their "Grand Estate." We were neither of us archaeologists, nor were we familiar with the ancient scripts which make the many monuments in this country so very interesting to students of old Turkish and Mongol dialects; but we were normally curious to see whatever relics we could of the decayed grandeur which once thrilled the Occident and gave Marco Polo, Rubriques, and Friar Oderic the reputation in their day of being extravagant liars. This



A Lama Tomb

valley of the Orkhon was the home of the first Turkish tribe which rose to the level of nomadic barbarity and acquired a certain share of letters and civilization—the Ouigur—and Karakorum was their capital. At the time of Ghengiz Khan they had been pushed further south and west by the Naiman Turki, and when these tribesmen were scattered, the Mongols occupied their city and there erected the place which the Pope's emissary said was not so fine as Notre Dame; but which others described in glowing superlatives. The city declined after the Mongol centre of power shifted to Shangtu and then to Peking, and after the eventual decline of the Mongols, the place fell to ruins, and it has only been in recent years that its site has been definitely fixed. Up to this time we had seen no ruins of any kind, although we kept a sharp look out every day, occasionally riding out of the track and picking up the caravan at night. Sometimes we saw stones bearing the sacred inscription of "Om mane padme hum" in the Tibetan and Mongol scripts, but, judging by appearances, they were of comparatively recent date, and, as is customary in the country, were, no doubt, cut and placed there by travelling lamas and pilgrims on their way to Lhasa or Urga, as an act of devotion. However, we chanced upon a slab of slate bearing an inscription in Tibetan characters which, from its size and worn appearance, seemed to indicate something unusual. Waiting for our caravan to come up, for we were not off the main track, we asked our Mongols whether they could decipher the letters or give us any information about the locality; but being unable to read, they could not assist us. We were on the point of continuing our journey when, looking through glasses to the north, we saw in the distance what appeared to be a big black mass of boulders. Our curiosity aroused, we decided to go and examine the spot, and putting out ponies at a trot, set out in the direction of the place. Upon approaching, we saw unmistakable ruins of buildings surrounded by an earth embankment some ten feet high. It was nearly an hour from the time we set out to

the time we arrived inside the wall, and we had trotted and cantered our horses all the way, so that the distance from the track was about seven or eight miles.

One large building, rectangular in shape, constructed of slate and stone cemented together, measured 77 by 77 paces, and occupied the most prominent position. There were ruins of smaller buildings near by constructed of the same materials, and evidently belonging to the same period. The embankment measured 300 by 300 paces, and at the south-west corner there were the ruins of what might have been a watch tower. A few paces outside the north wall were stone ruins of a column, and a little further off a *soborok*, or lama tomb, in a fairly good state of preservation. The ground showed signs of cultivation and there was unmistakable evidence of some system of irrigation, for the ground was intersected with dry cuts and canals running in the direction of a stream to the north-west of this site. There were heaps of loose stones, some of which were inscribed; but whether they belonged to the same period as the buildings I would not venture to say.

Our caravan was out of sight when we set out again, and two hours later, after picking our way across some very boggy and marshy land, into which our horses sank over their knees, we caught sight of our party encamped on the right bank of one of the tributaries of the Orkhon called the Karolhanggol. Near the exit of the valley we met a few Mongols and took the occasion to try and ascertain the name of the locality and find out something about the ruins we had visited. No one appeared to know anything about them or to take any interest. They were more desirous of knowing the price of sheep and cattle in Urga, and the condition of the country we had traversed. I frequently noticed, even among our own Mongols, a reluctance to give the name of a place of some special interest. There seems to be a superstitious dread of something awful happening if they should mention the name of a place until safely out of its vicinity. I



have since ascertained that the name of these ruins is Zagan Baishin.

The following three days were uneventful. Our supply of meat being ample, there was no reason to go in search of game, and there was nothing to relieve the monotony of the daily trek, as the country presented no new features of interest. Being in a region where water was scarce, we adapted ourselves to the circumstances and filled our small casks whenever we could, halting the caravan to enable our animals to nibble the grass wherever we came across a fine patch. The country for miles around presented the appearance of downs, with occasional clumps of trees growing on the north side of the low hills. On the eighth day much-needed and long-wished-for rain fell during the afternoon, and as our things were getting very wet we decided to camp and give our animals a well-earned rest. We calculated by dead reckoning that we should not be many miles from the Orkhon, and two hours before sunset we took up a position on some high land at the back of our camp and surveyed the surrounding country through field glasses. From our point of observation we saw, to our delight, a large expanse of water, which we afterwards recognized on the map, although unnamed, as a lake near the Orkhon called by the Mongols, Oginor. It rained intermittently during the night, but at sunrise on the following day there was not a cloud in the sky. Leaving the valley by a very easy road we descended the grassy slope on the other side in the direction of the lake, which opened up more and more to view as we proceeded—a fine stretch of water abounding with water fowl—and we lost no time in adding a few geese to our store by way of dietary change. This part of the country was very fertile and rich in cattle, which were owned by wealthy Mongols who were camped near the lake. Skirting the north shore we passed close to Arombinhurae, a small lamasery situated at the foot of some high hills commanding a view of the distant mountains which overlook the site of the ancient capital, Karakorum. An hour later we arrived at a place

where, on a fine day, when the mountains are not enveloped in clouds or when the misty haze is not too dense, a good view of the temple at Erdentzo, which is near the site of the ancient capital, can be obtained. Following the directions of Hottok, our guide, we searched through glasses in vain for the white patch of temples at the foot of the mountains. There was too much haze lying over the land, and we were approximately thirty miles off. The Mongols told us that nothing remains of Karakorum, or Erdentzo, meaning the "seat of a god," Erden being the name of the god, and "Tzo" meaning to sit. Hottok, our guide, had visited that lamasery during a pilgrimage, and had passed several days there.

Before noon we reached the long-looked-for Orkhon, where, we thought, we should be obliged to cross in dugouts; but we found the river low enough to ford. There was a fairly strong current running at the time, notwithstanding the fact that the river had in consequence of drought shrunk to about half its usual size at this time of the year. In conversation with the natives in charge of the dugouts, which were hauled upon the right bank, we learned that they had never seen the river so low before, and that it presaged all kinds of disasters. The usual method of crossing when the water is not frozen is by means of dugouts, which, as the name implies, are trunks of trees hollowed out. They are placed side by side, and held fast by a stout piece of wood lashed to each trunk a few feet from each end. The ox-carts are taken on boards, the wheels resting in the dugouts, which are hauled across the river by means of a rope made fast on the other side. The oxen are then driven into the water and have to make their way across as well as they can. If one is travelling with camels and horses, the horses swim the river and camels are attached by halters to the dugouts, on which the loads are placed, and are made to swim behind. Care has to be taken when approaching the opposite bank, for, on getting into shallow water, the camels sometimes flounder under the boats and turn them over if not properly managed. We forded without mishap, although my

saddlebags were partly immersed and I had an escape from being ducked, as my horse stumbled over a big stone in midstream. After adjusting the loads, we resumed our journey in the direction of a very fertile spot a couple of miles ahead, one of our Mongols riding out in advance to select a mid-day halting place, which he found on the wooded bank of a clear stream.

Our progress was now comparatively easy, the route lying through the fertile region of the Orkhon over even country, swampy in places, but withal quite good. As we proceeded, we observed that this territory was fairly well inhabited for a country where the estimated population of two millions does not average more than 1.5 per square mile. There were clusters of clean looking *yurts*, and the inhabitants had the appearance of being well dressed and well fed, sufficient proof of their prosperity. Being in the neighbourhood of a lamasery and not more than one day's journey from Erdentzo, we encountered many lamas going and coming, their bright attire of yellow and scarlet lending charm and animation to the scene. Sometimes they rode up and greeted us in a most friendly manner, putting the usual questions to us concerning ourselves and the object of our journey. I never found among the lamas anyone outside of Urga with any idea of the world beyond Siberia, Russia, China, and Tibet. Great Britain they did not appear to know, but a Tibetan lama, a native of Lhasa whom I met in Urga, told me that he had when a boy been to India. He was, like most of his countrymen, employed as instructor to student lamas, and I found him an interesting man and something of a linguist, for he could also speak Chinese.

We found a very quiet spot for our camp that night, under the shelter of a hill called Tologoi, which marks the western boundary of the plain. This part of the country is known to all Mongols as Togolhon, where every summer a fair is held and horse racing, archery, and wrestling form the chief items of interest. Mongols came from all parts of the

country to participate in these contests of skill and endurance, which last several days.

We had heard so much in Urga about Sainshabi that we decided to go there. Efforts to find that place on the map were futile; but from details furnished by natives and Russian traders we estimated that it must be about forty or fifty miles to the west of Karakorum, and on about the same parallel. We had a consultation with our Mongols that night as to the route we should follow, and it was decided that we should now bear off to the left of the road to Uliassutai in a south-westerly direction, and pick up the caravan track on the other side of the mountains bounding the south side of the plain. It was raining when we started next morning, and as there seemed no prospect of it clearing up, we camped, as the very wet loads were getting heavier and we were afraid the wet saddles on the camels, together with the constant rubbing, would cause sore backs, which, at this stage of the journey, we particularly wished to avoid.

Our Mongols also suggested the advisability of buying a sheep, as we were running short of mutton, which is the only meal they appear to enjoy, for fish and fowl are regarded by them as carrion. So we pitched our tents again at mid-day and turned the animals loose to graze. The ground was very wet and our things were drenched with the rain, which still continued to fall. Moreover, the temperature had fallen considerably, so that we had to put on skin coats to keep warm. In the afternoon Hottok, our guide, came back with a live sheep across the saddle, accompanied by the owner, who was a lama, stationed about two miles away with a small flock. A close inspection of the animal was made, and, upon the advice of Hottok, whose judgement of sheep, alive or dead, we considered second to none, we began talking about the price. The lama finally agreed to take 5 taels of silver, that is 5 Chinese ounces, and as we had provided ourselves with Chinese scales and a small quantity of silver cut in various sized pieces, ranging from about a quarter of an ounce to four ounces, we

proceeded to weigh out the requisite quantity, which operation took some little time, owing to the irregular weights of the pieces. Tea accompanied the proceedings, which the lama watched with interest, chatting the while with Hottok and asking all manner of questions about us.

Scales are a very necessary part of one's outfit even when travelling in some parts of China where payments are made in pieces of silver and the dollar is not in circulation, and more especially in this part of Asia where money is practically unknown outside the capital. The scales resemble a penholder and are very little longer, being rounded at each end, the divisions marked by little pieces of bone inlaid. About an inch and a half from one end there is a hole through which a cord is passed and by which the balance is held. A small metal pan, not so large as the palm of the hand, is attached to the end nearer to the pivot by means of thin cords, and a moveable weight, also fastened to a thin cord, completes the balance. There are three such balances all of which can be neatly packed in the small compass of a bamboo tube case and carried in the pocket. One balance is used when selling, one when buying, and the third records more or less correctly the weight of the silver. Needless to say that they are all marked differently, as their object would imply, and to travel without a full set, notwithstanding the questionable morality, would but proclaim one's ignorance of the customs of the country.

We at last managed to find the right pieces to make up the amount, and, on handing them to our lama friend, we were amused to see him produce from the deep folds of his garments a similar set, from which he carefully selected a balance, and poised the silver. As we expected, it did not agree with our weight, and a discussion as to whose weights were correct ensued. Several demonstrations were made and we at last compromised the matter by giving him a leather strap which evidently attracted his attention and with which he was very pleased. We parted very good friends and gave him credit for being a good business man.

By eight o'clock next morning the weather showed signs of clearing up, the sun broke through, and we spread our things out to dry. By mid-day we were on the road again, the animals having benefited by the rest and good pasturage. Keeping in a south-westerly direction we soon reached the summit of the pass leading over the high range of hills which bound the south side of the vast plain. Wild rhubarb was growing in abundance all around, covering the slopes of the hills, while here and there many hued wild flowers lent a dash of colour to the scene. Our passage across these valleys was slow and laboured owing to the steep gradients; but we were amply compensated by the welcome change in the scenery, which now began to assume a wild and romantic aspect. Forest-clad mountains, with rocky crags and boulders piled up in fantastic disorder, opened up to view as we mounted to the crest of a hill or paused to rest the caravan at the top of a pass.

On the 14th of July we had entered the neighbourhood of Sainshabi, the route lying across a few miles of swampy land where our camels had difficulty in keeping on their feet. The ponies occasionally sank in the soggy ground well above their knees, and at times it seemed as if the ground was moving under us. Progress was slow and dangerous, and, looking back, it is still a mystery to me how we extricated ourselves from that marshy land without accident. We soon arrived in an inhabited part of the valley, where we noticed evidence of wealth in the clean looking *yurts* and large quantities of cattle and sheep.

At four o'clock in the afternoon we saw some lama tombs on the top of a hill overlooking the entrance to the valley in which Sainshabi is situated, and, selecting a suitable spot, we camped for the rest of the day, resolving to enter Sainshabi on the morrow. Our little camp excited the curiosity of the natives for, on catching sight of us, they would ride over and exchange greetings.



Page 84

A Karakorum Golgotha

The Mongols strip their dead and throw them out to be devoured by wolves

Crossing the spurs of some hills we obtained our first view of Sainshabi or Sainhorin, as it is also called, from some high land overlooking the lamasery. Well worn tracks marked the route to the lamasery which, from the distance, seemed to be built in two parts.

At noon we had arrived. Knots of curious and interested natives watched as we slowly proceeded past the principal temples higher up the valley to a spot which Hottok had ridden out in advance to select for camping. We caught sight of Chinese and Russians here and there, who greeted us as we passed by. It was a very fertile part of the valley where our guide had decided we should halt, being sheltered by the mountains around, and within easy distance of the lamasery. One disagreeable feature of the place, however, was the great quantity of human bones and skulls strewn over the ground. It did not create a very agreeable impression in such picturesque surroundings, and when we remonstrated with Hottok for bringing us to such a graveyard, he replied that a better spot could not be found for our tired animals in the whole valley.

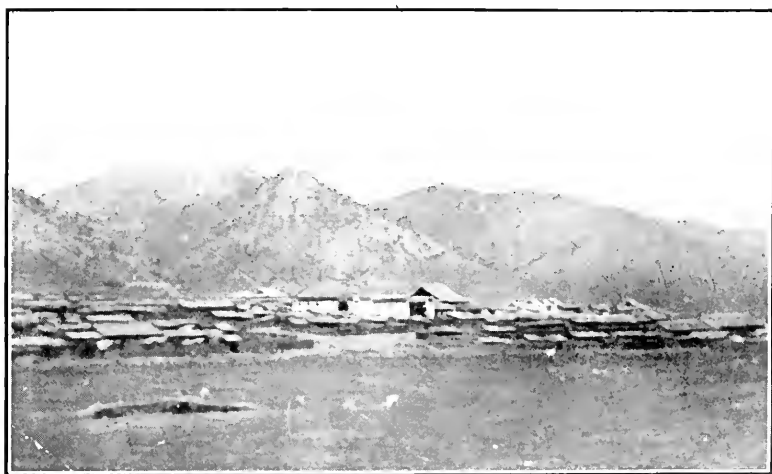
Consideration for our means of conveyance and transport outweighed our objections, and after removing the gruesome relics to a spot out of the immediate vicinity of the camp, the tents were pitched in anticipation of a couple of days' rest. The presence of Russian traders in this place laid us under the obligation of paying a few calls, and, after making ourselves fairly presentable, we set out to discharge our social duties in the best of spirits. As we rode up to their stores we noticed that they regarded us very inquisitively, which, in the circumstances, was somewhat natural; but when, after introductions had been made and we explained that we were on our way to Uliassutai, we were accorded a most hearty welcome and offers of assistance were spontaneously made. The Russians living in this remote part of Asia are very simple folk, chiefly from the Trans-Baikal region, and most of them, if not all, have seldom, if ever, been farther west than Irkutsk, which

represents to them the metropolis of Siberia, and—incidentally—their world. When they learnt that I was on my way to Europe they were at a loss to understand why I had not travelled by railway instead of going to the trouble of crossing Mongolia. They spoke of the hardships of the route ahead, and said that they would not be surprised to see me back again in Sainshabi, as they had had bad reports of the country between Uliassutai and Kobdo, where caravans had recently perished in consequence of the drought. These simple people were very hospitable. The *samovar* was instantly brought and a meal prepared beginning with a fine dish of Russian soup and some home-made bread, which we enjoyed and found very palatable after the heavy indigestible doughnuts the cook made for us every day. Their stores and living quarters were in the same building, the living quarters partitioned off from the sleeping apartment by a curtain. They were living under the same conditions as their Chinese neighbours, in Chinese-built houses adapted to foreign requirements. What the Mongol population of Sainshabi is, would be difficult to estimate, as it would vary in consequence of the nomadic habits of the people. At the time of my visit the non-Mongol population probably numbered 100 souls, of whom forty were Russians and the remainder Chinese.

Trading in Sainshabi is not without its interesting side, more especially as there is no money whatever in circulation. It reminds one of the early accounts of pioneers trading on the West Coast of Africa, when the natives bartered gold dust and ivory for all kinds of "muck and truck." In Sainshabi during my brief sojourn I saw natives exchanging native produce, even old saddlery for articles they most needed, such as brick tea, cloth and hardware, and needless to say the Russian traders invariably had the advantage, owing to the ignorance of the natives. Brick tea was circulating very freely: but in the process of changing hands so many times, pieces are chipped off the corners and traders take such bricks at a discount.



Saithurae—a lamasery and trade mart in the Karakorum country



*Sainshabi—a lamasery and trade mart in the neighbourhood of
Karakorum, the ancient capital of Mongolia*

The few Russian traders living here are doing pioneer work for houses in Urga. The same may be said of the Chinese, who at one time were the only non-Mongol residents at this encampment.

CHAPTER VIII.

SAINSHABI TO ULIASSUTAI.

At sunrise on the following day we were winding our way up the pass leading out of the valley and gradually leaving Sainshabi behind. It was a stiff climb, made difficult by the loose stones and uneven track. The pass was forest-clad and wild flowers were growing around. We were troubled by Mongol dogs that gave chase to us, barking and threatening to attack, and after many futile efforts to drive them off we had to shoot one as an object lesson to the rest. The pack immediately fell upon their fallen friend and tore him to pieces: and I noticed that, after retiring to a respectful distance, snarling and making feints as if about to renew the attack, they cleared off.

At the top of the pass we had to stop to examine the packs and the girths, as the somewhat steep climb had shaken things loose. The country all around presented new features, being wild and rugged. Descending into the neighbouring valley through well-wooded country by a track strewn with boulders and large stones, we emerged into a fine open region, picking up a well-defined path running in a north-westerly direction. The country was very fertile, but there was an absence of population. In fact we did not fall in with anyone until mid-day, and then it was with a pilgrim who was on his way to Lhasa. He was a young man, not more than 23 years of age, and had left Urga the previous year with the return of the spring, making the journey on foot, prostrating himself every mile or so, and performing other acts of religious devotion during his progress. His luggage for the journey consisted of a small goatskin bag, which he carried over his shoulder at the end of a staff. I envied him such a simple outfit for so long a journey: but the hospitality of the natives

in their *yurts* and at the lamaseries, makes such a journey, with so little, possible.

The weather was again very hot, and we were troubled with flies and mosquitoes; in fact, we seemed to be accompanied by a small cloud of them, since all efforts to shake them off were unsuccessful. We had arrived within easy distance of a river called the Hoitamir, the banks of which were delightfully wooded, affording a very refreshing shelter from the heat of the sun. The bed of the river was very stony and the current was strong, notwithstanding that the river was only half the normal size it attains when in full flood. So shallow in some places as to be fordable and deep in others, it hurried along under its shady banks with all the impetuosity and vigour of a mountain torrent. The heat was now quite oppressive, and with the lowering clouds and ominous appearance of the sky, we were not left long in doubt as to what was about to happen. The storm soon broke over us, carrying away a light tent, and rain literally poured from the clouds. After a deluge lasting about an hour, the sun broke through again and we were able, after drying a few of our things, to resume the journey in comparative comfort. The sudden storm had lowered the temperature considerably and dispersed the flies and mosquitoes, proving the truth of the old saying that it is an ill wind that blows nobody good. We met a party of mounted Mongols, all well armed and travelling in the direction of Urga. Two of them were officials, accompanied by their attendants and pack ponies, one of whom was carrying a long rod, to which was fastened a loop of rope for the purpose of catching fresh remounts. Seeing us as we rounded a bend in the valley, they changed their direction, going off the track almost at right angles and reaching high ground, giving us the impression that they were somewhat apprehensive and suspicious of us and our intentions. They continued to look round for some time after we had passed them until we lost sight of them completely in the bend of the valley.

We did not stop until well after sunset. It was a dark night and we ran into some rather swampy land, which necessitated going with extreme caution. On looking out of the tent next morning we saw, about four miles distant, a big cluster of temples on a mountain slope, and inquiring of our Mongols the name of the place, we were informed that we had reached Sait Hurae. The Hoitamir was again not more than a mile or so from our camp and we observed again with joy the wooded banks and approaches to the river. The current was flowing fairly strong and as we reached the middle of the fording place we found the river bed so uneven and full of big stones as to render crossing with a caravan a somewhat risky undertaking.

The camels with their loads occasionally floundered, filling us with uneasiness, while the ponies had the greatest difficulty in keeping on their legs in the middle of the stream where the current was fastest and strongest. We were very pleased to get across to the other side without a ducking and without loss, and, after a halt of a few minutes in order to give an eye to the girths, we slowly ascended to the track leading to Sait Hurae, where we arrived half-an-hour later.

Our caravan aroused some curiosity among the natives, among whom we recognized a few Chinese faces, and soon our servants were in animated conversation with their compatriots, who were apparently well pleased to meet their own countrymen, more especially since they were natives of North China and were able to give them news of what was going on in Peking.

This lama town, if one may call it such, offered nothing new or remarkable for study, being built on the slope of a mountain with the usual temples and lama habitations adjoining. A few stores kept by Chinese where a barter business is maintained, a small wool-washing plant of a very primitive type, a number of lama tombs, prayer wheels and sacred stones, were practically all the prominent features of this remote place.

We did not remain long in Sait Hurae as, from information obtained locally regarding the route, we learned that we were in for a pretty stiff climb, and setting our caravan in motion we turned again to the west and soon lost sight of Sait Hurae. We arrived at the foot of the pass, which revels in the name of Onlang Altsaigang Dava, or Red Flower Pass, named after a red flower said to grow on the mountain, but which in spite of careful search, we failed to find.

The exertion of climbing added greatly to our fatigue; but we plodded along and by noon reached a grassy knoll, where we halted for rest. There was a large herd of yaks browsing on the mountain slopes, while beneath us in the sunlit valley flocks of sheep and herds of cattle were grazing. As we ascended to the summit of the pass the atmosphere became oppressive and the sky was full of huge clouds hanging over the pass and enveloping the mountain peak. The route became worse as we proceeded, leading through rocky defiles and water-worn ravines, strewn with boulders and stones, which filled us with concern for the pads of the camels. I thought of the supply of the rawhide thongs and big needles our Mongols had brought with them to patch up the camels' pads in case of need, and shuddered at the thought of being obliged to have recourse to this crude mode of veterinary surgery, which is commonly resorted to in this part of Asia.

Suddenly there was a vivid flash in the sky, followed by a crash of thunder which seemed to shake the very earth. Our startled animals broke loose and tried to get away in all directions; but the nature of the country prevented them going far. The ponies were more frightened than the camels and tried to make a bolt down the pass, but did not succeed. The lightning played all round us, followed by terrific peals of thunder, which echoed and reverberated in the mountain fastnesses with almost deafening effect. There was a veritable deluge of rain, and a few minutes after we had got our caravan together again we were drenched to the skin,

with no prospect of shelter and no other alternative but to go on. Once wet nothing matters; our chief concern was for the increasing weight on the backs of the camels, the loads of which were by now literally streaming with water.

It was about two hours later, the storm having passed to the east, that we beheld some signs of improvement in the weather, for which we were very grateful; and this comforting outlook, with the summit of the pass in sight, and within comparatively easy distance, put new life and energy into us. By the time we reached the top of the pass, which is marked by a huge *obo*, the sun had pierced the clouds again and we were thankful for the delightful warmth it imparted to the cold damp atmosphere hanging over the mountain. We halted the caravan while an inspection of the animals' feet was made and our Mongols, ever devout, prostrated themselves before the *obo*.

We had, during the last twelve hours, reached a higher altitude than we had yet attained during our journey and, on looking ahead in the direction of the west, we observed snow-clad peaks of a mountain range lit by the rays of the sun and standing out conspicuously in dazzling whiteness amid the rocky heights of the intervening country. The route on the other side of the pass was comparatively easy after the first few hundred yards of it, which followed the dry bed of a mountain torrent, and we soon picked up an even camel track leading to the Hanongol, or Khaningol as it is described on the China Inland Mission map. We took the right bank of the river and followed it until sunset, keeping in the valley through which it flows all the time. During our progress we observed an abundance of waterfowl, heron, cranes, bustard, and here and there came upon the horns of the argali or big horned sheep. We had not proceeded more than a few miles from the river when a horseman rode up dressed in Mongol clothes and riding much after the style of the Mongols. He greeted us in Russian, thinking no doubt that we were his compatriots; but on observing his

mistake, he lost no time in putting his pony at a gallop and made off in the direction of a cluster of tents on the other side of the river. We watched him disappear and began to wonder what was going to happen, since after observing our dress and the fact that we were not Russians, he did not give us an opportunity of speaking to him. A dozen or more people came out from *yurts* and watched us go by; but did not appear to be desirous of making our acquaintance.

We afterwards learnt from a Mongol in charge of a herd of ponies further along the valley that our mysterious friend was a Russian trader, who had come to barter cloth and sundry useful articles for sheep and camel wool, had brought with him a few assistants, and that they were all living with the Mongols. It was too far and we were too tired to go across to see them, more especially as we still had some distance to cover before we could hope to camp with benefit to our animals. It was not before 10 o'clock that night that we reached the narrow exit to the valley, where we found a suitable place for pitching our tents.

It was June the 19th. We had hoped by then to be within easy distance of Uliassutai as, according to the various calculations we had made before leaving Urga, we arrived at a conservative estimate of twenty-one days, which was considered ample time to allow for covering the distance of 950 miles separating Uliassutai from the Capital by the route we travelled. We had so far experienced good weather and, except for delays caused by rain and snowstorms, we had not been obliged to stop. Care of our animals, however, was the chief consideration and, as we depended upon them entirely for our means of transport, we soon realized that if we were to arrive in Uliassutai without losing a single animal, we should have to study the condition of the country in relation to the requirements of our beasts of burden. We did not, in our calculations, allow for such drawbacks as lack of water and poor pasture lands; but from reports on the effect of the drought received from natives travelling eastward,

we realized that our difficulties were still ahead of us. We therefore decided, after consulting with our guides, to camp whenever we came upon good grass land in order to rest the caravan and save, as far as circumstances permitted, the diminishing supply of oats we had brought with us from Urga for the ponies.

As I have already stated in the early part of the narrative, it is unwise to be in a hurry in this country when dealing with the natives. The old Italian saying :

“Chi vá piano vá sano, chi vá sano vá lontano” applies equally well when travelling over a strange and comparatively little known land fraught with the many difficulties that the various physical features and peculiarities of so vast a country offers. On one occasion when travelling in Manchuria by mule cart, I was very discontented with the daily rate of progress. Being anxious to reach my destination, and chafing inwardly at the delay, I prevailed upon the Chinese carter to start earlier and put in a long day. It was in the late autumn; the first fall of snow covered the vast plains, and the temperature was not at all conducive to travelling in that bleak and dreary region in an open Chinese cart. As arranged, we started in the dark next morning, leaving the little Manchurian village still asleep. We soon picked up the cart track and I was delighted at the success of getting away earlier; while I reclined in the skin-lined cart, padded with cushions and sheepskins to lessen the jolting and jarring that this springless vehicle sets up, I mentally calculated the distance, and how much sooner I should arrive at my destination by starting earlier and proceeding until after sunset. We kept on until the late afternoon, having stopped at two inns on the way, and as there was nothing in sight I asked the carter where we should put up that night. He did not know: perhaps we should not reach another village until after midnight. The prospect of spending the night in the open at that season of the year when temperature is below freezing point did



Tibetan Yak at Home

Page 90



Our Caravan en route to Uliassutai

Page 94

not appeal to me, and when I remonstrated with him for his stupidity he answered me by saying that seeing I was in such a hurry to press on and cover more ground, he thought I would not object to the extra fatigue and exposure. We soon turned off the track and made for a small village a few miles away, where we were able to put up that night; but to use a Chinese expression, I had lost "face," and, moreover, I did not make another attempt to interfere with the well-ordered itinerary.

We now realized that if we reached Uliassutai by the end of June we should be lucky, and as we were now entering that part of the country which is the home of the *argali*, the prospect of a few days sport filled our mental horizon and compensated in some measure for the momentary disappointment we felt at the slow progress of our journey.

The following morning we were on the road again, the country around furnishing us with plenty of geese and ducks, which we found in great numbers near the river. We now invariably left our camping ground before the caravan started, accompanied by one of our Mongols, and scoured the country in search of game, picking up our party before sunset, and although, at times, we came back empty-handed, we nevertheless enjoyed these trips, which greatly relieved the monotony of following in the wake of the camels.

The natural beauties of the country with its changing features, from peaceful meadow lands and valleys splashed with sunlight, reminding one of places in Europe, to mountainous country, wild and romantic, with rocky heights and high impending crags, sometimes bare, sometimes wooded, filled us with feelings of wonder and rapture as the successive changes in the country and landscape unrolled before us. Long broad valleys, taking sometimes a whole day and even longer to traverse, and valleys more like the rocky defiles in high mountain passes, through which gushed the turbulent waters of mountain torrents, all impressed upon us the beauties of our surroundings.

The long hours in the saddle acted as a wonderful sleeping draught, for we had no sooner made fast for the night than we fell asleep, even before the cook had the evening meal ready. The writing of a diary I had so valiantly begun at the outset of the journey became a task every night, and I afterwards carried it in my saddle bag and recorded impressions in it during the occasional halts.

To come back to the journey, we were now about to cross the Hanongol again. This time we met with a small mishap which, however, was not serious. A thunderstorm broke over us while we were fording the river and so frightened the camels that one of them plunged, causing the pack to shift and throwing the poor beast in the water on its side. It was the only bad-tempered animal in the caravan, and the one which usually made more noise when being loaded or unloaded than all the rest put together. In a moment we were off our ponies. The little Mongol, grasping the situation in an instant, and unsheathing the knife which Mongols always carry suspended from a belt, cut the entangling ropes and set the poor beast free. It was the work of a minute to get it on its feet again, for the camel rose up quivering all over with excitement and fright. We rescued the pack with some difficulty and were glad to find that it only contained cooking utensils and tinned provisions.

We started again, after a temporary halt to repair the damage, and, ascending a steep and tedious track, reached a high plateau many miles in extent. Snow-clad mountains, wooded here and there to within a few hundred feet of the snow line, formed the natural boundary of this high land we had now reached, the wild and rugged beauties of which we should, no doubt, have enjoyed more had we not been drenched by the storm and chilled by the unexpected immersion in the icy waters of the Hanongol. There was also a noticeable fall in the temperature, followed by a hail storm which greatly distressed us, for we were exposed to the full force of it on the open plateau with no prospect of shelter. The storm



Travelling Tent of a Wealthy Mongol Pilgrim, near Urga



A Well in the Desert of Mongolia

was driving to the south-east and did not show signs of abating, and as it would have served no purpose to stop and camp on the spot, we kept going. An hour later we met a big caravan of some fifty mounted men accompanying an official travelling cart, which lumbered along the uneven stony trail, bumping and swaying from side to side, and which was drawn by three mounted men going at a canter. We were stopped by some of the men who questioned us carefully concerning our journey. As our curiosity was also aroused by the display of wealth and rank, we inquired the name of the distinguished traveller, and were informed that it was Na Bel, a well-known Mongol official, travelling to Urga with his wife and goods and chattels. Hailstones do not permit of a nice exchange of courtesies, and as they were all anxious to be off, we quickly parted, the armed horsemen galloping after the retreating caravan without more ado.

We descended from the plateau by a tortuous track, sending the loose stones to the bottom of a deep ravine as our ponies literally slid down on their hind quarters. The task of getting the camels down was a fairly ticklish one, and we thought every moment they would slip and break their legs or fall down and be lost in the ravine below. The Mongols, however, are experienced in this kind of work and know from experience the capabilities and limitations of these curious quadrupeds. We left this work to them, while we took charge of the four ponies. The country around reminded me of parts of the Swiss Alps, being wild and well wooded, with snow-capped mountain peaks towering high above. Heads and horns of the argali literally covered the ground, while the spoor of that animal was everywhere noticeable in the soft earth. We did not get within range of a live specimen the whole day, owing to the difficulties of the country; but we occasionally caught sight of them as they bounded from rock to rock and boulder to boulder, sometimes stopping to look down from dizzy heights to the plain below, secure in their mountain retreat. It is an ideal place for the ibex

and argali, some of the remote fastnesses being almost inaccessible to the hunter unless properly equipped.

Traversing another valley we reached a bend of the Tchollottergol, or stony river, which does not belie its name. In full flood it must be a formidable torrent, as it dashes down from the mountains and rushes headlong over its boulder-strewn bed, carrying all before it. At the place where we selected to cross there was no water, but the huge boulders, worn smooth by the force of the current, rendered the crossing a tedious and dangerous task, owing to the nature of the rock-cumbered bed. We could hear the noise of the rushing water beneath the bed of the river like the sound of a weir or waterfall.

Higher up the valley there was a large field of unmelted snow, some 6-ft. deep in places, which had a noticeable influence upon the temperature of the surrounding atmosphere.

Our eagerness to get a shot at the argali resulted in an incident which, although amusing, might have been attended with serious consequences. Riding slowly along the right bank of the river in the late afternoon, we were suddenly aroused from our reverie by the Mongol guide telling us that he could see the argali. Glasses were instantly turned in the direction indicated, and we could certainly see in the distance, on the other side of the river, what appeared to be like that animal feeding in some long grass. Crossing the river again, and going on horseback as near as we dared, we threw the reins of our ponies to Hottok and commenced to stalk our prey. Creeping along the ground and taking what cover we could, we came to within about 600 yards; but the argali was no longer visible. Suddenly a head appeared, and we were about to take aim when, to our amazement and disappointment, we saw a grey pony's head, the reins over its neck, and not far away a Mongol hunter kindling the fire to make tea. This little incident caused a great deal of amusement at the time; but we afterwards wondered what would have been the consequence of shooting the hunter and his

horse. Needless to say, we were very sceptical when any member of the caravan thought he could see the big horned sheep, and this was a standing joke against Hottok, who appreciated it no less than we.

By this time the sun was sinking behind the mountains and casting long shadows along the valley. Our caravan had gone ahead some distance and, putting our horses at a canter, we overtook it at another bend of the river, where the water in the fordable part reached the flaps of the saddle. We camped near the river under a towering mass of rock, which rises to a sharp and lofty peak high above the water. Eagles were wheeling aloft, their nests being in the recesses and crevices of the rocks and rocky ledges. They seemed to resent our intrusion and the more daring ones swept down over our camp as if about to attack us. We could see them perched upon the ledges of the rock and, notwithstanding the failing light, took a few shots at them, but without effect. The reports of the guns re-echoing in this mountain-locked valley sounded like volleys of musketry being fired in rapid succession, and soon every winged thing nesting in the rocks was in motion.

The weather next morning was not very promising. There was a heavy fall of rain during the night and this delayed our departure. The prospect of a stiff climb over the Egindava and the scarcity of pasture-land on the other side did not fill us with any enthusiasm. We were ready to start by seven o'clock, and after a laboured climb, reached the ridge of a hill commanding a fine view of the contiguous country. Slowly and laboriously climbing, we attained an altitude above the tree line, and soon entered upon a more difficult stage of the journey. Mountains devoid of vegetation, precipitous ascents and waterworn gullies rendered our progress snail-like. The hoarse cries of the Mongols as they urged the camels forward, picking their way cautiously along the stony pass, acted like a whip upon the jaded beasts as they redoubled their efforts and forged ahead. Here and

there snow was lying in deep drifts while the mountain valleys were full of mist, and storm clouds were hanging over the distant peaks. It was noon before we reached the summit, where we found an unusually large *obo*, with stakes in the ground to which wisps of hair from the manes of ponies and tufts of camel wool were attached. A halt was made to allow of the customary prayers being said, our Mongols being most devout Buddhists, while we collected a few stones to add to the *obo* and the Chinese fixed pieces of camel wool and horsehair to the stakes in the ground.

The scenery was most impressive. Snowclad peaks rose ahead of us, while all around was barren, bleak and storm-swept, and not a ray of sun pierced the black sullen sky to gladden the prospect.

During the following two days we traversed a region utterly devoid of vegetation, and having all the physical peculiarities of desert land. The native reports on this part of the country had by no means been exaggerated, for the bleaching bones of camels and horses marked the route from valley to valley.

All was wild and impressive with steep and rocky ascents and descents, and we proceeded across this wilderness slowly and with great difficulty. Riding ahead in search of water holes and pasture-land we invariably found them dry and the ground for miles around scorched and parched, owing to the lack of rain. The country began to tell upon the camels. Their humps were diminishing in size and hanging flat and flabby over their backs, and in consequence of their now having lost all their wool, they looked more like plucked geese than ships of the desert. There were moments of anxiety when one of them came down, and we at times despaired of ever getting them on their feet again, for they were in very poor condition. At this stage of the journey it became imperative for all members of the party to walk, so as to lighten the labour of the animals and minimize the risks of losing any of them.

There was neither bird nor beast nor sign of human habitation; nothing but the whitening remains of abandoned caravans lining the track.

Towards the end of the second day in this wilderness we commenced the ascent of a long and tedious rock-strewn pass leading to another valley. A big belt of black clouds fringed with gold, hung in the western sky, throwing into bold relief the sharp outlines of the distant snow-peaks; while the unbroken silence and the rugged beauties of this scene added to the sense of utter desolation.

Reaching the top of the pass after sunset we scrambled down the other side, slipping and sliding and groping our way in the gathering darkness to a suitable camping ground.

In the afternoon of the following day we arrived at a small river called the Tsakin. It was nearly dry, the water lying in pools here and there, while a small stream trickled along its stony bed. At the farther end of the valley we observed a few *yurts* and pasturing herds, mostly composed of yaks, and we realized with feelings of relief that we were again entering a fertile region.

Herds of antelopes were moving about the plains and across the broad sweeping slopes of the valleys; but we never came near enough to fire with hope of success, as the ground afforded no cover. The track was less difficult, and in fact part of the way it lay across fine grassland for many miles.

When we reached the Sharosnigol we crossed to the other side, following the course of the river in a westerly direction. On the 23rd July we entered the valley in which the Sharosnigol and the Harosnigol meet. There is a direct route from here to Kiachta running in a north-easterly direction, and according to report, the country in the neighbourhood of that track was very fertile, and many Mongols had migrated to that part of the country, owing to the abundance of pasture-land. About one day's journey to the north-east in the direction of Kiachta, there is a small

encampment and lamasery called Purgun Hurae, where a few Russian and Chinese traders are established.

We passed a belt of country honeycombed with holes and burrows, full of marmots and field rats, which scampered away and hid themselves in the ground on our approach. There were also very big herds of horses, some of which must have numbered 2,000 at least. It was interesting to see the Mongols driving them from place to place, or catching them by means of the noose of rope at the end of the long willow pole.

Ruins and sites of lama graves and tombs were very noticeable in this valley, and one of the most interesting stones we saw was a solid block 7-ft. high, bearing an illegible inscription in Turkish or Arabic characters.

Following the Sharosnigol through a narrow mountain-locked valley, the southern slopes of which were very barren, we intermittently came upon patches of new grass by the banks of the river, which formed a delightful contrast to the arid appearance of the surrounding country. The argali and ibex were in evidence everywhere. In some places we found piles of their skulls and horns left by Mongol hunters. We occasionally caught sight of them in their mountain homes; but were never able to get within range.

Bearing to the north-west we left the valley through which the Sharosnigol flows, and soon caught sight of the Otogontenger, a conical-shaped, snow-clad mountain in the Mongolian Altai. According to local tradition no one has ever reached the summit, and those who have attempted the ascent have returned complaining of violent hemorrhage at the nose and ears. It is regarded as a holy mountain by Mongols and Chinese, and pilgrimages are frequently made to it from all parts of the country. When the Manchus were the masters of Mongolia, the Amban of the district usually made a journey to the mountains, when religious ceremonies and feasts lasting several days were held in its vicinity. Our Mongols were greatly impressed and followed the time-

honoured custom of prostrating themselves on the ground and muttering prayers.

Crossing another river, called the Bogdingol, which evidently rises in the Otogontenger, we gradually commenced the ascent of a pass called the Dolon Dava, from the top of which we obtained a fine view of the chain of mountains which from our point of view, appeared to terminate abruptly in the Otogontenger.

The slope on the other side of the pass was forest-clad. Wild flowers common to our English woods and meadows in springtime were growing in the forest and studding the grassy knolis. For the first time during the journey we heard the cuckoo. His simple voice coming from the woods struck a note of homely music upon the still evening air, as tired and worn with the exertions of the day we carefully picked our way down the pass.

Twenty-nine days after leaving Urga we commenced the last stage of the journey to Uliassutai. Following the well-wooded bank of the Bogdingol to the entrance to the valley in which the town is situated, we forded the river, and at 5 o'clock in the afternoon pitched our tents about 4 miles from Uliassutai.

We rode into the town next morning to call at the Russian Consulate, and when we found it closed we realized that it was Sunday. We had scarcely gone a few hundred yards when a Cossack came galloping after us with a card from Captain von Meyer, of the Consulate guard, inviting us to return and take lunch with him.

Learning that we were encamped some four miles outside the town, he insisted upon our coming inside, and placed at our disposal an unoccupied house in the Consulate compound. Moreover, he sent out four Cossacks to bring in our caravan, gave us quarters for our servants, and had our animals turned loose in the grazing grounds reserved for the horses of the Cossack guard.

Uliassutai is a small place and a very disappointing one. On the map it would appear to be a town of some size; but in reality it has only one thoroughfare, flanked with Russian and Chinese stores, which can be traversed on foot in a quarter of an hour. A few years ago it was an important centre for Chinese trade; but as most of the principal Chinese merchants fled during the political troubles of 1912, few have since had the temerity to return and re-open their stores and incidentally re-establish commercial relations with the natives.

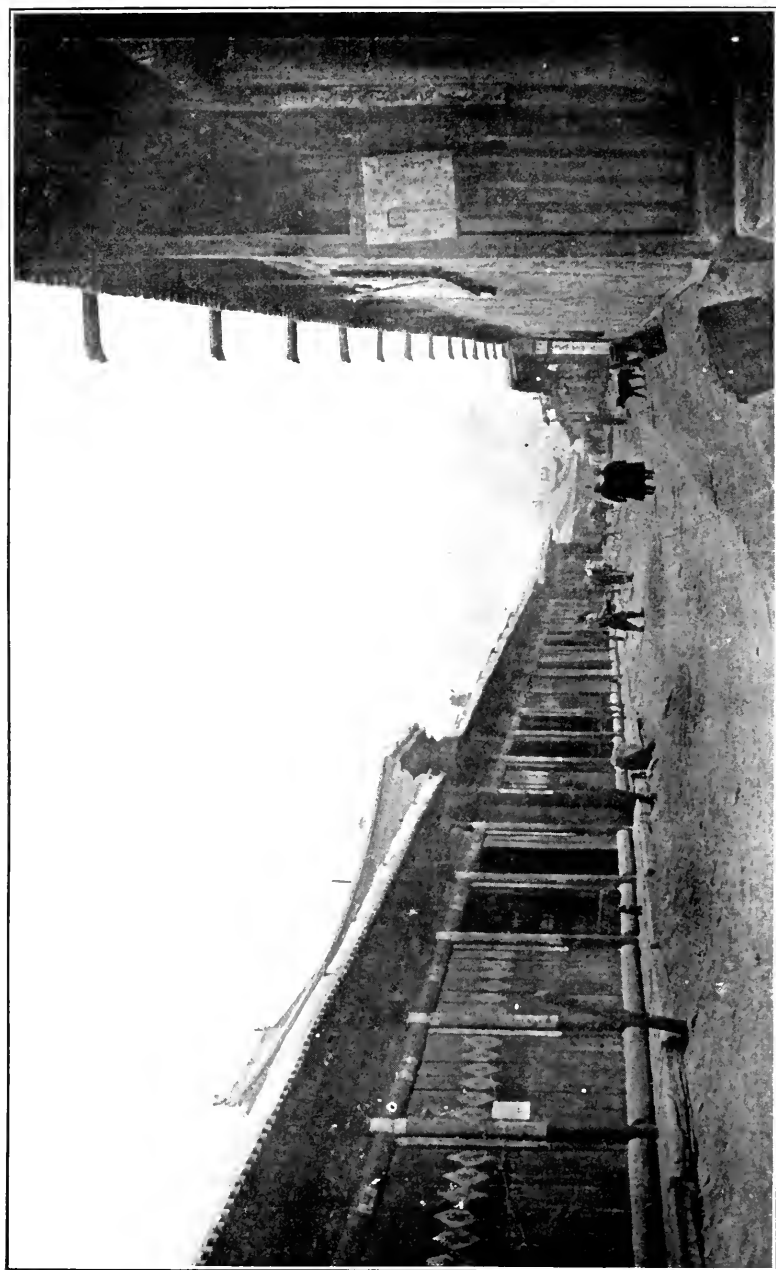
It is now a centre for Russian trade, and is in direct communication with Kiachta and Urga. In addition to the few stores which cater to the local Mongol population, there are traders scattered all over the outlying districts buying native produce for Russian houses. An enterprising Russian trader, Mr. Ignatieff, conducts wool washing operations on a considerable scale, and employs male and female native labour to operate his somewhat primitive plant.

The Russian Government maintains a Consulate and a guard of about 30 Cossacks, mostly Buriats from the Trans-Baikal region, for the protection of Russian interests.

Being only a trading mart with a few traders and their families, life in such a remote place is very monotonous. Beyond shooting and riding, which become part of the daily routine, there are no distractions, and the small Russian population is thrown entirely upon its own resources for its social pleasures and amusements.

The Acting Consul, Dr. von Wladimirsky, and Captain von Meyer were very hospitable and did all in their power to render the few days spent with them enjoyable, and it was with some feeling of regret that I began making preparations for the journey to Kobdo.

When the animals were brought into the compound for inspection it did not take long to perceive that it would not be possible to carry out the original intention of taking them as far as Kobdo, for they were in such a wretched condition. As Mr. Mamen was not returning to Urga for some weeks, it



was decided that we should leave them in Uliassutai to give them an opportunity of recovering from the effects of the arduous journey.

Dr. von Wladimirsky secured a permit from the Mongol officials to enable me to travel with Government animals, which necessitated leaving behind all superfluous impedimenta, even to tents and provisions, and living entirely with the Mongols at the various stages *en route*.

CHAPTER IX.

PONY POST TO KOBDO.

On the 3rd of July we left Kobdo. Wong had set out two hours ahead of me in company with a Mongol guide, and after taking leave of our kind hosts, we turned the ponies' heads in the direction of the west and soon picked up the route leading to the exit of the valley in which Uliassutai is situated.

It was very unpleasant going. The heat and flies seemed to increase as we proceeded, and this added to the stony and uneven track through the narrow rockbound valley, considerably augmented our fatigue and physical discomfort. Our ponies were fresh and we sent them along at a good pace, sometimes breaking into a canter, and I occasionally fell to wondering what riding men would think of cantering or trotting a horse along a hard and stony track in England. The animals in this part of the world, however, are accustomed to it and are very hardy. I have noticed that the natives themselves invariably ride at a fast trot on long journeys, while in the capital where the tracks and open places are literally covered with stones, they go at a gallop.

Emerging from the valley and taking the high ground at the exit, the road leads across a grassy plateau bounded by high land. The country was dotted all over with pasturing herds, and fertile land watered by the Bogdingol lay around us. We soon caught sight of the smoke rising from a *yurt*, and on approaching saw a number of horses tethered outside to a headline stretched between two stakes driven in the ground. Our guide informed us that we had arrived at the first relay station, where we could obtain fresh mounts. Wong, who had preceded me by two hours, had arrived at the

first stage an hour ahead of me, and appeared to be on the best of terms with the inmates of the station, notwithstanding his limited knowledge of the Mongol tongue, for I found him drinking tea and fortifying himself for the exertions of the next stage with a toothsome piece of fat mutton. The dogs were particularly vicious, and there were many. We did not dismount until they had been beaten off to a less dangerous distance. We delivered our ponies to the lama in charge, who gave orders for them to be unsaddled, and upon production of the permit, fresh animals were caught and brought in. At the invitation of the lama, we entered the *yurt*, where we found tea being freshly prepared by a Mongol woman. A big iron pan, black with usage and smoke and many layers of fatty matter mixed with dirt, was boiling over an open fire made of *argol*, or dried camel droppings. The lama's female companion—a dirty slut of a woman in a filthy gown, which at one time when new must have been a study in brilliant colours—was standing over the steaming decoction, ladle in hand, of which she made frequent use by stirring the tea, raising it and letting it fall back again, much after the manner of a *chêf* when preparing soup.

Wooden bowls were produced, black and dirty with constant use and want of washing, into which she ladled some of the contents of the pan, tasting it before doing so. I had very little relish for the tea after seeing it prepared; but as all the other occupants of the *yurt*—and there were at least a dozen packed in the small space—were apparently enjoying it, I pocketed my prejudice and sipped the hot beverage in a tentative manner.

Made of brick tea, the coarse leaves of which floated in the pot, with sheep's and goat's milk plentifully added, and—last but not least—the addition of a little salt which I must confess greatly improved the flavour, I found after having successfully accomplished the first bowl, no feeling of nausea; and since it was palatable and refreshing, began to think that my dislike at first was due more to imagination than to fact.

I drank successive bowls with diminishing disgust and gradually growing relish.

Some cold fat mutton was then produced, and we all fell to eating it without ceremony, the natives sometimes using their knives with great dexterity. Having satisfied ourselves with a meal of mutton and tea, and the ponies now being in readiness, Wong went ahead with two fresh camels, while we took a short rest. Living *à la Mongol* is not what one would describe as a desirable experience, as the staple food is mutton heated in water for about ten to fifteen minutes. There are no vegetables, no cereals, and no bread. Mutton, and tea to which plenty of milk is added, are the principal foods of the natives. A guest is always offered the fat tail of the sheep as a special mark of distinction, and whether he likes fat or not it makes no difference: he has to make some pretence of eating it. Even to those of good digestion the Mongol cuisine becomes something of a trial of their gastronomic power. In the summer a slight dietary change is introduced by eating less meat and drinking more milk and tea. It was already 4 o'clock when we were ready to start again, and after paying the hire of the animals we set out, accompanied by a guide attached to the station, to cover the distance to the next one. We had grave doubts of our physical ability to ride three stages before midnight, in view of the fact that we had started late, as the distances between the second and the third stages were unusually great; but with fresh animals under us, good weather, and a substantial meal of mutton and tea, we felt as we took leave of our Mongol hosts that we were under-rating our physical fitness.

As we rode on we noticed the gradual change in the country, from the comparatively wild and rocky valley we had left, to open country bounded by high land permitting occasional views of the distant snow-clad mountains to the west. The soil was sandy and thinly covered with grass, while in some places the sand was so deep as to render the journey on this stage very hard work for man and beast. We

followed the Bogdingol for some distance, losing it at intervals and picking it up again at the second stage, which we reached about 8 o'clock. We arrived at about the same time as the camels which, being very lightly laden, maintained a fast pace all the way. This was a particularly fertile part of the valley, owing chiefly to the abundance of water from the river. A few Mongols were encamped with their cattle and the Government station was well supplied with horses and camels. We had no difficulty in distinguishing the official tent from the rest and, after going through the usual custom of summoning the inmates to come out and restrain the dogs before dismounting, and partaking of tea, always ready for the traveller, we requested that fresh ponies be caught with all haste, as we were desirous of accomplishing the third stage on that day.

The heat and malodorous atmosphere inside that *yurt* were simply overpowering, and I was pleased to escape into the fresh evening air as soon as decency permitted. The tent dwellers did not seem to mind in the least. Reared in that kind of atmosphere, their sense of smell becomes less acute. It made me feel hot and uncomfortable when I saw the sweat-begrimed faces round the *argol* fire, watching with eager expectation the chunks of mutton stewing in the one and only pan.

There was a remarkably fine sunset, the snow-clad range was plainly discernible under the flood of crimson light that flamed in the western sky. The guide told us that, of the three stages from Uliassutai, the one we were now about to undertake was the longest and most trying, owing to the sand. They had given us good mounts, which had been well rested and well fed, besides being young and fast. When they were brought in to be saddled, they showed a strong disinclination to make a journey that night, and scenting out the cause of their being disturbed, showed their unfriendly feelings by snorting, plunging, kicking, rearing up on their hind legs, and generally demonstrating in every known equine way that they

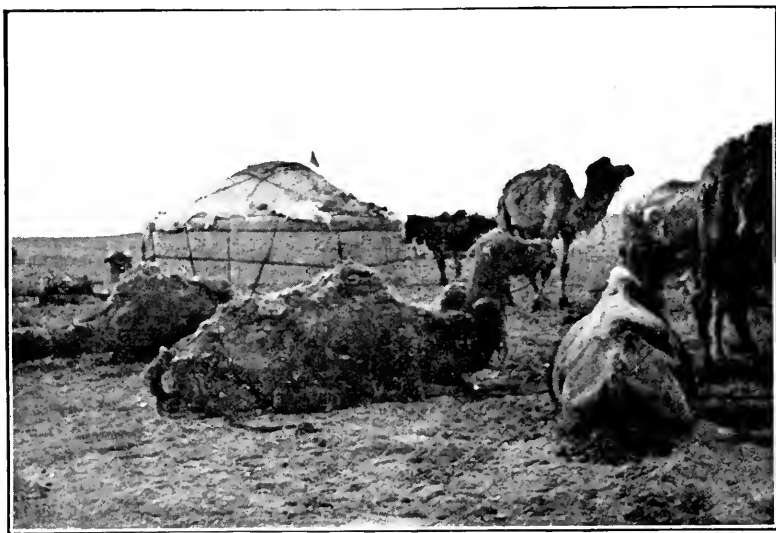
would give us a lively time if we succeeded in mounting them. It took us a quarter of an hour or so to get in the saddle, and before we had time to shout a friendly adieu to our Mongol host, we were galloping madly across some meadowland, closely followed by a guide.

Time and distance soon began to tell and wore them down to a less spirited temper, and after a couple of hours they were so tractable that we could have discharged a gun from their backs without setting them off at a gallop. We were riding well together, the camels ahead of us, lightly laden, maintaining a fast ambling pace, led by another guide on horseback, with which we could only keep up by going at a brisk trot. Night soon closed in upon us, raising an almost impenetrable veil of darkness around as we trotted sidt by side over the sandy waste. I thought at times we had lost our way, and on asking the guide how much farther we had to go, he frankly confessed that he did not know, as the darkness did not permit of his picking up the familiar landmarks of the country.

The route seemed to descend into another sandy region, which I thought would never end. Sometimes peering ahead trying to penetrate the wall of darkness I would imagine that I saw a light and call out to the guide that we were in the neighbourhood of an encampment; but I soon found that it was my imagination playing me a trick. We rode on in silence for what seemed to be hours, never stopping to rest and keeping up a fast trot the whole time. Sometimes the guide would light a pipe with his tinder, and but for this little red glow, which did not last very long, there was nothing to relieve the monotony of the utter darkness. We at length came to what appeared to be an embankment, down the sandy slope of which we slid more than rode, and soon found ourselves in a swampy region, which was worse going than the sand. The hoarse barking of dogs faintly heard in the distance betokened that we were within easy reach of our destination,



A Camel Caravan



A Relay Station in the Desert between Uliassutai and Kobdo

and after fording a deep stream full of water reeds, we came upon the third stage.

For a few minutes we were surrounded by dogs barking and making feints to come at us, and it was not until one of the occupants of the *yurt* came to our assistance and beat them off that we were able to move from our saddles. Notwithstanding the thoughts of the stifling atmosphere in the tent and the probable vicious attacks from the lively vermin in the dirty coverings and cushions on the floor, I felt the need of rest, and seeing the cheerful fire revive again with the addition of a handful of fuel, I felt the attractions of that rude and dirty interior, which my tired limbs were unable to resist. Throwing myself full length on the floor, I fell asleep, too fatigued to take even a bowl of tea.

I was not allowed to enjoy this blissful state for long, as the inhabitants of this part of the world are up before sunrise, looking after their flocks and herds. Preparations for tea were in progress when I opened my eyes, feeling that I had not been to bed all night; but after hastily performing my morning ablutions I began to feel fresh. The sun was not yet above the horizon, the morning air was keen, and a heavy dew lay over the ground. I drank the tea with relish, while a pan full of mutton was being cooked over a fire outside the *yurt*. A woman inside was busily beating mare's milk in a big skin bag, and on the advice of the Mongols, who said it had great sustaining qualities, I took a bowl of it. This and the half-cooked—I might say hot, raw—mutton, with a nut of unleavened bread Wong had thoughtfully prepared, enabled me to make a substantial breakfast, and I felt equal to the fatigues of the day. It was a very rough and ready meal, but it satisfied the robust appetite one acquires after being all day in the saddle. The Mongols are very fond of mare's milk which, when beaten in a skin bag, sets up a kind of fermentation. It is generally known as "*ku mis*" and its preparation does not appear to have undergone any change since Marco Polo first saw and described the process.

Resuming the journey on fresh animals at about 7 a.m., we entered upon a still more disagreeable stage. Sand hills stretching in an unbroken line as far as the eye could see formed the left boundary of our track, while on the right a vast region of desert land extended for miles. The route lay across arid sandy wastes, where occasional patches of scrub and withered grass, harboured swarms of flies. As the sun mounted the sky, the heat became almost unbearable, and this, added to the exertion of riding animals already showing signs of fatigue and greatly tormented by horse flies, made the journey something of a test of endurance from stage to stage.

We did not leave the sixth stage or *ort* until 9 o'clock on the following morning, the route lying parallel to the unbroken chain of sand hills which we still kept on the left. It was a mystery to me how the guide picked up his bearings, since the track would be obliterated and even the particular features of the country changed after a violent sandstorm. We had a fall of rain during the morning, bringing with it a very welcome freshness to the atmosphere which, however, did not last long. Sand all the way—nothing but sand and desert scrub full of big flies which bit and stung our ponies, nearly maddening them. My arms ached with trying to beat them off, for they were concealed in the scrub in such swarms that our progress through this region was positively painful for man and beast.

The mounts we had picked up at this stage were in poor condition, having been ridden hard the day before, but they were the best of the few poor beasts maintained at the station. There was a scarcity of grass near the bank of the river, which also accounted for the condition of the animals at this place. They all, without exception, had sore backs, and as it was a case of taking them or walking, we had to stifle our prejudice and feelings and try to forget the raw places under the saddles.

There was no change in the features of the country the whole day. At the 8th stage, which we reached about 6



Crossing the Telgol on a Water Reed Ferry



Crossing the Telgol

o'clock, we took the opportunity, while fresh ponies were being caught and saddled, to take a dip in the river. The bed of the Bogdingol is very sandy and dangerous, owing to the soft places here and there into which one rapidly sinks without warning.

We resumed the journey an hour later, the animals being less jaded than those we had picked up during the early part of the day. The lama in charge of the station insisted upon sending two guides with us, because the track was covered by the sandstorm which had swept over that part of the country the previous day.

It was a very tiresome ride over deep sand, through which the ponies proceeded with difficulty, while the two camels with which we could scarcely keep pace, were quite in their native element. Long after sunset we had not found the station. A starlit night, but there was no moon. The landmarks, such as they were, had vanished with the day and the guides had lost their bearings. A halt was made while one of them rode out to see if he could find the river; but he returned an hour later, unsuccessful. A brief consultation was held and it was decided that we should keep on in the direction we had been going, thinking that we could not be far from our destination. We proceeded, occasionally halting and listening intently, while the guides disappeared in the darkness in search of the track. At frequent intervals we fired a gun to attract the attention of those at the station; but the sharp reports brought no answer and nothing but silence and darkness prevailed.

Midnight passed and we had become resigned to a night in the open, hoping with the return of the morning to find our way to the 9th stage, when, on discharging two more barrels, we were rewarded by hearing faintly in the distance the barking of dogs, and we realized that they were not very far away.

The guides lost no time in setting the pace again, and following close behind them we arrived at length, after an hour's ride, at the 9th station, which was composed of two

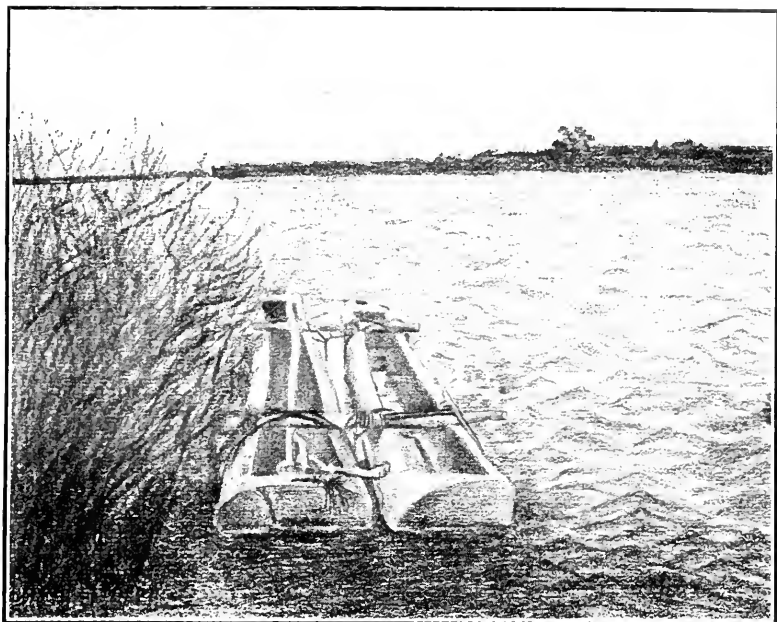
yurts only. Being the only human habitations for many miles round, we could have easily missed them in the darkness.

The dogs gave us a warm reception, and with their green eyes gleaming in the darkness, they looked like a pack of wolves about to fall upon us. It was not until the Mongols, whom we had aroused out of their sleep, had come out and beaten them off, that we felt we could dismount without fear of being torn to pieces and creep inside the *yurt*, where the dying embers of the *argol* fire still glowed and shed a ray of welcome.

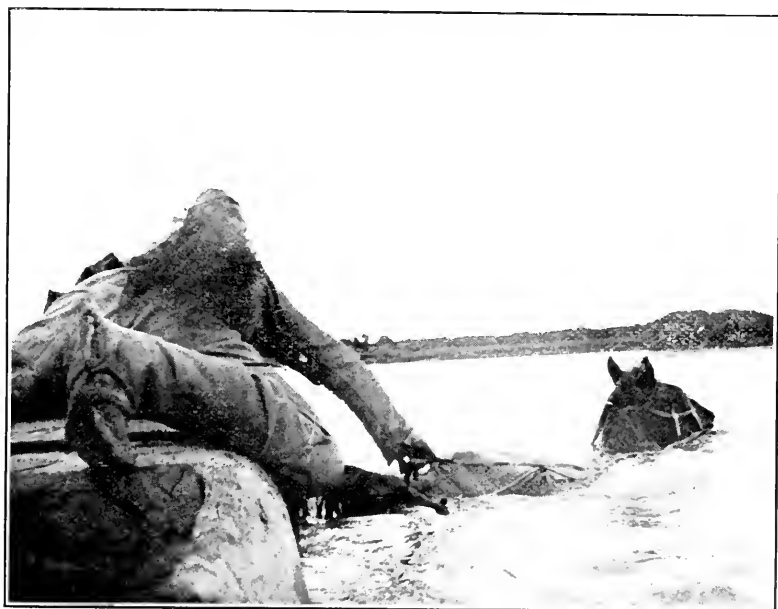
When the animals had been unsaddled and turned loose mine host came in with a fresh supply of *argol*, and after adding a few handfuls to the smouldering fire, soon restored the flame, and—incidentally—the light. Notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, fresh tea was made and mutton prepared, in which meal everyone shared. I can still see the faces illumined by the glow of the fire, and hear the grunts and sighs of satisfaction as our party did justice to the meal.

Setting out next morning I was so badly mounted that I found it impossible to keep up with the guide, and, after vainly endeavouring to maintain the pace, was obliged to return for a fresh pony. I often wondered how they managed to keep the animals alive in that part of the country, as the barrenness of the region is most striking. The Mongols told me that the relay stations were continually shifting, keeping close to the Bogdingol or Sapkhin, as it is sometimes called, as pasture-land though of very meagre and poor quality, is mostly found on or near the banks of the river. This necessitates taking guides who are accustomed to the country and know the positions of the stages in their immediate neighbourhood. The guides usually travel to the next station, which seldom comprises more than three *yurts*, and return the following day with the animals.

We had not met anyone on the road since leaving Ulias-sutai, but there was ample evidence of caravans having



Dug-outs used for crossing River Kobdo



One of our Horses towing the dug-out ferry across the River Kobdo

perished, in the bleaching skeletons and human remains we saw during this part of the journey.

We followed the course of the Bogdingol, and towards midday on the 6th of July, reached Lake Karanor, a vast expanse of water round the shore of which there were patches of pasture-land sufficient to maintain the Government stage of *yurts*. Pursuing the track on the north side of the lake, we reached the Telgol, a swift river running through a rocky valley. Here for the first time during the journey we were obliged to unsaddle the ponies and camels and let them swim across, while the baggage was placed on a primitive kind of ferry made of a big bundle of water reeds fastened together. This unstable looking craft was hauled across the stream by means of a stout rope manipulated by men on both banks. I must confess that I had some feelings of apprehension when I saw this frail vessel and speculated upon the probabilities of reaching the opposite side without being capsized; but after several trials with a few light packages, it became apparent that with skilful handling on the part of the natives the passage could be successfully accomplished. This river, the Telgol, flows from Lake Karanor and rushes through the narrow rocky valley like a mountain torrent. The current was so swift and strong that it was necessary for all hands to assist the four natives in charge of the operations.

The animals entered the river at a wider part where it was not so deep, and we ultimately had the satisfaction of getting all our belongings to the other side without loss.

The scenery from here onwards is most impressive, with the snow-clad peaks of the Mongolian Altai to the south-west and vast plains of sand with patches of desert scrub. Towards sunset we reached Lake Kharaussunor, where the Mongolian Altai, called by the Mongols Chargonol, seemed to close in the southern shore of this expanse of water. The mosquitoes and flies in this region were very troublesome and we regretted not having brought anything to protect us against their persistent attacks.

Skirting the north side of this lake and traversing a vast sandy waste we reached the east bank of the River Kobdo, where we found a big camp of Mongol soldiers. The banks of this river were particularly fertile, and here and there were clumps of trees growing down to the water's edge.

We found an empty *yurt* a few yards from the river bank, where we stopped for the night, as it was then too late to attempt to cross the river. Mutton bones were strewn over the floor, and dirty discarded native garments were covering some of the spaces on the wicker frame of the *yurt* where the felt had rotted away. The ground inside was black and we could see the stars through the many uncovered places in the roof.

How we survived that night I do not know. The heat and mosquitoes were so unbearable that, in spite of the fatigues of the day and the careful precautions we took to cover our faces and hands before trying to sleep, we were awake all night. I could hear the sighs and muttered oaths of the Mongols as they tossed from side to side or got up and went outside the *yurt* in a futile endeavour to find a place where they would be less disturbed, and the next morning our hands and faces were so swollen from the bites and stings of these pests that we were scarcely recognizable.

We were now entering upon the last stage of the journey to Kobdo, and after obtaining fresh mounts all of which had sore backs, we moved down to the river and prepared for crossing. The width of the river at this point is about equal to that of the Thames at London Bridge. There were two dug-outs into which we loaded our baggage, and when all was ready, the ponies were chased into the water, while the camels were attached by the head to a couple of ropes held by a native at one end of the dug-out. At the other end, one of the ponies supplied the power by swimming, and pulling this quaint boat across the river. A Mongol leaned over the fore part and grasped the tail in the right hand, while guiding the pony by means of reins in the left. In this manner we crossed the



Kobdo. Sacked by the Mongols in 1912.

river, and on getting into shallow water on the opposite bank, where the camels astern of us were able to touch ground with their feet, they floundered under the dug-out and all but succeeded in upsetting us. By the time the ponies were caught and we were ready to start again it was nearly midday. The country on the other side of the river showed signs of comparatively recent cultivation, but was then overgrown with weeds and long grass.

The poor conditions of our mounts soon began to tell, more especially in the neighbourhood of Kobdo where there are some stiff climbs. We could only proceed at a slow walk, even over fairly level ground in the valleys, and this and the heat greatly increased our fatigue.

We at length entered the valley in which Kobdo is situated. As we issued from a rocky defile Kobdo burst into view. The first sight of the town, on arriving from the east after the many weary miles of desert and desolation, was very welcome, and in my parched and thirsty condition I allowed my thoughts to dwell upon the pleasing prospect of a cold drink.

Delightfully situated in a fertile valley watered by the Bointugol which rises in the Altai range, the little town attracts attention immediately by the trees hiding it from view. It is the more conspicuous from the fact that there is not another tree for hundreds of miles around. Mongol *yurts* were well dotted about the valley and large herds of cattle were grazing in the fertile pasture land.

Crossing a very marshy stretch of land, into which the ponies floundered over their knees, we at length reached the outer wall of the town and entered by an opening evidently forced during the siege in August 1912. We passed along the almost deserted thoroughfare and at length stopped outside a house over which the Russian flag was displayed. It was the Russian Consulate, and here we stopped while I presented my letter of introduction to the Russian Consul, Mr. Louba, who had been apprised of my visit from Urga.

After the customary exchange of courtesies the first question he asked was whether we would like any refreshment after the long ride. I need hardly record here the obvious reply, but I would say that the long draughts of cold light beer compensated for many of the fatigues of the last stage.

Mr. Louba very kindly accompanied us to quarters in an old Chinese house occupied by a Russian trader, and after dismissing the guides and delivering the animals into their charge, Wong, with the assistance of one of the Chinese domestics in the employ of our Russian host, soon made our quarters habitable.

The distance of the route by which we had travelled from Uliassutai to Kobdo which is north of the usual one, is approximately 470 miles, being divided into fourteen stages. Leaving Uliassutai on the 3rd July at eleven o'clock in the morning we reached Kobdo at four in the afternoon, the 8th of July, having ridden three stages or *orts* a day, accomplishing the journey in little more than five days.

The day after our arrival was spent looking around the town, which bore all the scars of a siege. During the struggle for the Independence of Mongolia in 1912, the Mongols sacked the town, and only a few Chinese residents escaped with their lives. What now remains of Chinese occupation bears eloquent testimony to the civilization of that nation. Fine dwelling and business houses, with spacious compounds and storehouses line both sides of the main thoroughfare. The names of their former owners and occupants, emblazoned in letters of gold, are still to be seen over the massive wooden doors. A fine poplar grove, said to have been planted by Manchus more than a century ago, runs through the town affording a most refreshing shade during the summer heat and rendering life in this remote and dreary spot more supportable.

During the Manchu occupation of this town, trade relations with Kansu and Chinese Turkestan were regularly maintained, and the land outside the town was cultivated.

These routes were unsafe at the time of my visit and untravelled, the passes infested with Chinese and Mongol brigands, the land around Kobdo overgrown with grass and weeds, and what was once a thriving town in Western Mongolia was then rapidly becoming a heap of ruins.

A Russian Consul, Cossack guard, a few Russian traders representing commercial houses in the Biisk in the Russian Altai, and Chinese coolies in the employ of Russians form the entire foreign population. The Mongols live in their *yurts* outside the town with their flocks and herds.

The few days spent in Kobdo were full of pleasant associations. Mr. Louba, the Russian Consul, and the officers of the Cossack guard, Captain von Masalsky, Prince Ouchtomsky, Captain von Nasaroff and Dr. Ampiloff, entertained me as only Russians know how, and their charming hospitality will ever remain one of the pleasantest recollections of the journey.

CHAPTER X.

BY TELEGA TO THE BORDER.

It was my intention to reach Kosh Agatch on the Mongol-Siberian frontier on horseback; but since the Mongol Government had ceased to maintain remount stations *en route* I was reluctantly compelled to abandon the idea.

There was a Russian carter at Kobdo about to return to Kosh Agatch and I made arrangements with him to carry me as far as the frontier, distant about 280 miles. I should have left the same day, but the river Bointugol had risen so much during the night, in consequence of heavy rains and melting snows, that it was rendered unfordable. On the 13th of July the driver, Vassily Vassilieff, brought the welcome news that a crossing was possible, the river having fallen during the night, and after taking leave of my Russian hosts we set out and reached the other side without mishap.

I had a *telega* and three horses, and a *toredoika*, a species of two-wheeled, springless trolley drawn by two Russian horses. These two vehicles were just sufficient for myself, Wong, two drivers and the baggage.

For the ensuing three days we journeyed through a sort of Alpine region, climbing more or less steadily the whole day. The country was wild and rugged, the route frequently running to within a few hundred feet of the snow line, while the weather grew much colder. Traversing at intervals valleys cumbered with huge boulders, our vision intermittently fell upon an imposing snow-clad peak of the Altai range, on the side of which the sun shone with dazzling whiteness. There were no *yurts en route*; we slept out in the open at night, covering ourselves with sheepskin clothes and lying under the vehicles. Our stock of provisions was very small,



Page 120

A Poplar Grove in Kobdo—the one Bright Spot in Western Mongolia

as we could only get a few loaves of bread at Kobdo and enough mutton to last two days; after which we were obliged to fall back upon the bag of *sakari* which the drivers had brought with them. In this part of the world, where bread is a luxury, *sakari*, a kind of hard crust cut in pieces about the size of the cubes of sugar used in tea, forms the principal diet of Russian carters journeying between Kobdo and Kosh Agatch. Tea we had in bricks, and as water was plentiful, we found sustaining powers in a bowl of this beverage, strengthened with a handful of *sakari*.

Once more we encountered the river Kobdo and crossed without being obliged to unharness, thanks to a species of pontoon ferry on to which the vehicles were driven and carried across. The ferry was attached to a stout wire rope, at the end of which there was a steel lock running on a heavy wire hawser stretched across the river. By making use of the rudder the boatmen make the passage with no other motive force than the strong current itself. On the opposite side of the river, at a place called Ulegei, there is a small telegraph station belonging to the Russians, who intend to link Kobdo up with the civilized world in course of time. I noticed that the work of installing the line was in progress a few miles before arriving at Ulegei.

Thenceforward the route was a great improvement upon that of the preceding days. It descended gradually into a region of milder temperature, signs of vegetation increasing as we continued. In the green valley, through which we passed, sheep and cattle were pasturing in great numbers, and the Tibetan yak was everywhere in evidence. At one particularly fertile spot, called Horlik, some ninety versts from Kosh Agatch, wool washing operations were in progress, and a few Russian traders were living in *yurts*.

At last we reached an immense plateau bounded on all sides by mountains, and at three o'clock in the afternoon we reached the first sign of European habitation in a small Russian excise station, forty-six versts from Kosh Agatch.

Here a halt was made and passports were registered by the official in charge, who invited me to take tea with him. On learning that I had come from China, he told me that he had been in the Far East and had taken part in the Russo-Japanese War.

As it was only forty-six versts, approximately thirty miles, to Kosh Agatch, I was anxious to reach the frontier station that day so as not spend another night on the road. The drivers did not think the horses could do it; but the excise officer said the road was so good that we ought to reach the place by nightfall. I prevailed upon the drivers to make an attempt and we set off after a short rest. Towards sunset we sighted the little white church of Kosh Agatch low down on the plain, and after a brisk drive soon reached the custom house and frontier station, which was closed and in darkness. The frontier Commissioner, Mr. Vasilenko, hearing of my arrival, came out and welcomed me, placing quarters at my disposal in the Government compound. We lost no time in making ourselves comfortable in the commodious quarters, and the frontier Commissioner, anticipating that we were short of fresh provisions, sent a supply of bread and eggs, which were greatly appreciated, as the few stores which supplied the needs of this small place were long since closed, and the inhabitants asleep.

Wong, with his usual adaptability to all circumstances and conditions, soon had a meal prepared, although at first it seemed that the Russian stove was going to baffle him in his attempts to get it going, and I heard him murmuring some well-chosen Chinese epithets while he persevered with his task. The prospect of a night's rest in a camp bed under cover, after the experiences of the previous fortnight, was very delightful, and it was not long after supper that lights were extinguished and we were enjoying a well-earned sleep.

The following morning Vassily Vasilieff, who had conveyed me from Kobdo, came into the compound looking

very much the worse for wear, as a result of too much fraternizing the previous night with his bosom friends of Kosh Agatch. He had come to tell me that, owing to the poor condition of his horses, he did not think he would be able to undertake the journey to Biisk. He had friends, however, who were returning to Shabalinoi and who would be willing to conduct me to that village, where I should be able to make fresh arrangements for the continuance of the journey.

On requesting him to send his friends to see me, he said they were already in the compound, and, with a low whistle and wave of the hand, he produced them from all quarters of the yard, where they were waiting for the given signal. A fine burly lot of men they were, picturesque in their red blouses, baggy trousers, and knee boots, their long unkempt hair almost touching the nape of their necks, forming a fine setting for the rugged, weather-beaten features of the types seen in this part of the Altai. They also had the same sleepless appearance as Vassily, and had no doubt paid in kind for his personal introduction and recommendation.

It did not take long to perceive that they had previously agreed to ask one price for the journey to Shabalinoi, and as I found it very exorbitant, I dismissed them with ridicule. but knowing full well that I was completely at their mercy.

Kosh Agatch is a very small frontier station, with a sprinkling of log-built houses, a church, a telegraph and post office, a school, and a few stores. It is on the main thoroughfare between Biisk and Kobdo at the extremity of a vast fertile plateau many miles in extent which is enclosed by the snow-clad peaks of the Altai mountains. The altitude of Kosh Agatch is some 940 *sasheen*, or 6,580-ft., above the sea level, and on approaching it from the Mongolian side the traveller is gratified by its delightful and picturesque situation and also the reappearance of fresh forest and wood covering the fertile slopes of the mountains. In the appellation of Kosh Agatch there is a particular significance, for it means "Good-bye Forest," which the traveller journeying to the

treeless regions of Kobdo and Uliassutai cannot fail to remember.

After the meagre diet of *sakari* and tea of the previous few days, I fully expected that at Kosh Agatch provisions would be obtainable; but to my surprise the few stores of this frontier town stocked practically everything but things to eat. Efforts to obtain bread, eggs, flour, and meat were also unsuccessful, but Mr. Vasilenko came to my assistance and put me in the way of obtaining a small supply of flour, which Wong soon transformed into fairly digestible bread, and this, supplemented by a score of eggs obtained from a neighbouring peasant, who generously parted with his surplus stock, was all that could be obtained.

The inhabitants of this part of the world get whatever provisions they require direct from Biisk, which accounts for the stores not catering for their needs. The stores stock principally hardware goods, saddlery, cotton and woollen stuffs, and brick tea, which find a ready market among the Russian and native population of this region.

Vassily returned late in the afternoon, saying that he would be prepared to convey me to Biisk, as the condition of his horses had so improved since his visit of the morning that he had not now the same apprehension he had previously exhibited. He undertook to cover the distance in ten days, stipulating for a full day's rest at Shabalinoi, his native village, from which he had been absent six months and from which place the journey was to be completed in his brother's *telega* and *toredoika*.

He was less exorbitant in his demands than his colleagues, and finally, upon the advice of Mr. Vasilenko, I decided to engage him again for the journey, paying the customary bargain money in advance. It was agreed to start on the following morning, and Wong proposed making a fresh attempt to obtain meat and a further supply of eggs, a suggestion I strongly supported, since the scanty supply upon

which we had already drawn was insufficient for our needs for a couple of days.

He set off in company with Vassily, with whom he had become a kind of bosom companion during the journey from Kobdo, owing to his willingness to lend a hand with the horses or kindle a fire during a halt *en route*. It was very amusing to observe how Wong, with a limited stock of not more than twenty Russian words, would hold a most eloquent conversation with Vassily. His gestures supplied the verbal and grammatical deficiencies and enabled him by frequent use of the popular and ever-recurring *nitchevo* and *da, da, da*, to convey his meaning on all occasions. On re-entering our quarters some time later, I heard strange sounds coming from the kitchen and there found Wong lying in front of the stove with a small basket of eggs and a loaf of bread. Efforts to arouse him were futile. He snored steadily on, showing all the signs of having drunk well but not wisely.

I prepared my own supper that night and incidentally a curtain lecture for the morning. He looked a sorry individual when he brought my breakfast, and immediately disarmed me by giving a very graphic description of his excursion in company with Vassily in search of eggs, which resulted in drinking too much *vodka* pressed upon him by the too hospitable peasants.

Noting Wong's condition, I began to have doubts about Vasily making an attempt to start that day as arranged, and expected every moment that he would send an excuse saying that the horses were sick, or that the *telega* had to be repaired; but no—he drove into the compound about two hours after the appointed time, showing a strong disinclination to talk and a passionate desire for copious draughts of cold water. It did not take long to load up, and after taking leave of Mr. Vasilenko, we were soon on the road again, moving at a sharp trot.

CHAPTER XI.

THROUGH THE SIBERIAN ALTAI.

The pace at which we set out from Kosh Agatch was not maintained very long, as the road began to rise, and we were obliged to get out and walk over the pass leading into the valley through which the River Chu flows.

Having reached the river, Vasily, who was still in a morose mood and very thirsty, suggested a temporary halt to make tea, to which I offered no objection, as I felt the desire for something refreshing after the tedious and dusty climb over the pass. A fire was soon kindled and tea prepared, which greatly helped to restore Vasily to his normal physical condition, and incidentally to a good humour. The animals appreciated the halt and the opportunity to feed in the long grass, for they resisted all efforts to catch them for a while.

Continuing the journey over a very rough road, the beauties of the country disclosed themselves with every bend as the route reached a high elevation. Forests of Siberian pine clothed the hill sides and mountain slopes, while the meadows and verdant knolls were ablaze with wild flowers. The banks of the Chu are delightfully wooded, and about its fertile shores and meadowlands the pasturing herds of the native *yurt* dwellers were grazing.

We had entered that part of the country where the population is chiefly Kalmuck. We could see their *yurts* dotted about in the valley, and occasionally met them tending their cattle. In appearance they are the same as the Mongols, being a stem of that family. They inhabit parts of South-east European Russia, North Caucasia and West Siberia. In the sixteenth century they occupied the region be-

tween the Altai, Lake Balkash and the Tien Shan mountains, where they were known as the four Oirates, or Eleuths according to the Chinese. They were divided into Dzungars, Tunguts, Khoshots and Durbots, some of whom settled on the lower Volga in the early part of the seventeenth century. About one hundred and fifty years later they trekked in the direction of Dzungaria, but only a few of them survived the journey, and the Chinese allowed them to settle in the valley of Ili. According to statistics, they now number about 100,000 in European Russia, 10,000 in Western Siberia. Like the Mongols they are Buddhists and follow pastoral occupations, living in *yurts* similar in construction and design to those to be seen in Mongolia. There are noticeable differences in the dress of the women who, instead of wearing a pointed yellow hat surmounted by a glass button, affect a simple but yet very comfortable and ornamental head-dress of lambskin dyed black, fashioned much after the style of a Scotch cap, but much bigger and pointed at both ends.

They display the same taste for bright colours observable among the Mongols, and I noticed that the women's garments were more voluminous than those of their Mongol sisters. They gave the impression of being clean in their habits, while their well ordered *yurts*, in which one occasionally sees some ornament or picture, betokens in some small degree contact with their Russian neighbours, with whom they appear to live on terms of equality.

Returning to the journey, which was momentarily interrupted while briefly describing the interesting inhabitants of this part of the Altai, we were nearing the end of the first day away from Kosh Agatch when I asked Vasily where we could put up for the night. We were making for a solitary log hut some versts ahead, the inmates of which were well known to him, and he said we might be able to find shelter there till the morning. A drenching rain began to fall in

the late afternoon and soon everything was wet. Rain clouds were hanging over the valleys, obscuring the view of the distant peaks of the Altai range.

We reached the small log cabin before sunset, and found that the inhabitants could put us up for the night. It was a very small farm with a few outhouses all built of wood and fenced in, owned by a carter who was employed in transport work between Biisk and Kobdo. His wife and daughters attended to the cattle and household duties during his absence when the traffic between those two places was particularly brisk.

Soon the horses were taken out and the carts run under cover for the night, while the peasant's wife offered me the hospitality of their own quarters. It was a nice cozy room, living and sleeping quarters combined. A young woman, one of the peasant's married daughters, sat in the corner crooning over a cradle suspended from the ceiling which she gently swung to and fro. The indispensable *samovar* was immediately brought in and soon tea was prepared, which beverage was very comforting after the cold ride in the chilled, moisture-laden atmosphere of the valley.

Wong excited much admiration. His long black queue, reaching to his waist, caused one of the daughters, less richly endowed by Nature, to cast envious glances in his direction. They at first thought he was a woman dressed in man's clothes, and Wong, catching the meaning of their remarks, looked somewhat embarrassed. Mine hostess, a bright communicative woman, had many a tale to tell of the hardships of travelling in winter, when caravans are sometimes lost in the snow or perish in blizzards that sweep over the country at that season of the year. It is a very hard life for the carters, and only those of excellent physique can endure the rigours of the climate and continual exposure to all weathers on the beaten track between Biisk and Kobdo.

The rain ceased falling during the night; but there was a heavy white cloud in the valley when we set out next

morning along the rough but beaten track to Biisk. By mid-day the sun had pierced the clouds and dispelled the mists, imparting a very welcome warmth to the moist atmosphere. We were a few hundred feet above the river, and from our elevation obtained a fine view of the surrounding country. A truly Alpine panorama of snow-capped mountains and extensive belts of forest-land stretched out before us, while below the sullen roar of the river was distinctly audible as it sped along by its thickly wooded banks.

There was a lot of uphill work at this stage of the journey, necessitating our walking and pushing the vehicles up some of the sharper inclines of the road, while the work of negotiating the very steep and stony descents was equally fatiguing, requiring the most careful handling to prevent the vehicles overturning at some of the sharp bends of the tortuous track.

I ventured to ask Vasily, who had now returned to his normal physical state, where we should put up for the night; but his answer was so evasive that I thought it wiser to await developments. We stopped occasionally for tea, kindling a fire by the roadside, and getting the water from the river. The eggs Wong had boiled hard before setting out from Kosh Agatch were almost entirely minus their shells after the hard pounding over the rough road, notwithstanding their having been most carefully packed. Vasily had brought a big bag of *sakari*, so that in putting our provisions together we had about enough to last to Shabalinoi, where I was encouraged to think fresh supplies could be obtained. Vasily was for ever describing the importance of his native place. Whenever I asked him about provisions and accommodation he always replied, "*Barin*, wait till we reach Shabalinoi." His native village represented to him the last word in comfort and modern civilization and he was never weary of describing its beauties.

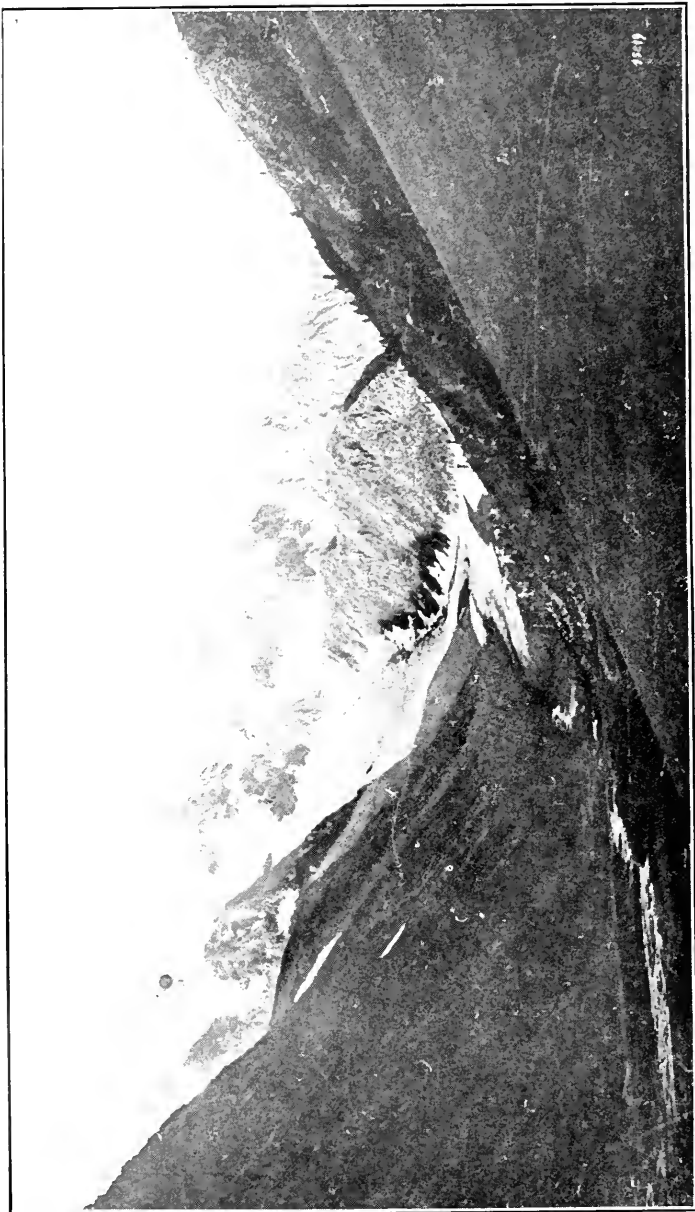
We passed Kirai and Tehibit, each place being represented by the solitary log cabin of a settler. A priest visits these

remote habitations once a month and ministers to the spiritual needs of his scanty but widely scattered flock.

There were many caravans of horse carts *en route* in charge of Russian drivers. Some we overtook were going in the direction of Biisk, others were bound for Kobdo with provisions and fodder for the small military outpost of that place. We occasionally halted with them to take tea and snatch a hasty meal, and I was pleased to have the opportunity of forming a closer acquaintance with the natives of this part of Siberia, who spend their lives on the open road in all weathers. Courteous, obliging, and always willing to lend a hand, they are ever ready to invite you to share their simple fare and volunteer information about the country.

Even as I write I can see their weather-beaten faces about the camp fire and hear their conversation, which chiefly fell upon their individual experiences and such subjects of common interest as lay within the limits of their occupation. They are often absent from their homes for months at a time, picking up merchandise for transport at all odd and out of the way places, much after the manner of a tramp steamer. Fine physical types, with deep religious feelings and generous impulses, they impressed me greatly with their qualities of heart and mind.

We had left Tehibit a few versts behind and were gradually descending to the level of the river near the bank of which Vasily said we should have to spend the night. We halted a few yards from the river and turned the horses loose, while Wong busied himself with making tea. There was a very heavy dew during the night, that penetrated our sleeping bags, but in spite of this the sleep in the open under the starlit sky was most enjoyable and put a very keen edge upon the morning appetite. Even the hard *sakari* and stone-like nuts of bread were eaten with considerable relish when washed down by copious draughts of tea. We followed the river for some distance, the road in many places being very dangerous, owing to the marshy nature of the ground. The horses



Page 151

In the Siberian Altai. The Katuna Glacier

floundered through these bad places, while the hubs of the wheels were at times quite submerged. We were glad to reach a less dangerous part of the road, which soon began to rise as we approached some high cliffs overlooking the east bank of the river. We traversed the winding road leading to a route cut in the precipitous face of the cliff, rising all the time by a steep incline. At one very sharp bend in the road the *telega* overturned throwing the baggage out, and it was only saved from falling into the river a few hundred feet below by the small coping, a foot high, formed at the time the road was cut.

After righting the *telega*, Vasily crossed himself and thanked Heaven for the mishap being no worse than it was. We descended again by easy stages to Angulak, which was marked by the lonely log hut of a settler. Kalmuck *yurts* and yaks were noticeable on the opposite bank of the river and we occasionally caught sight of them throughout the narrow valley in which we were travelling.

In the afternoon we arrived in the neighbourhood of the Katuna, one of the principal rivers of the Altai, rising in the Katuna glacier on the slopes of the Byelukha. Traversing the remote regions of the Altai it issues from a narrow gorge and after joining forces with the Chu, flows in an easterly direction.

We crossed this river on a species of pontoon ferry, capable of taking several vehicles, without being obliged to take the horses out of the shafts. The motive power was supplied by the current itself, the ferry being attached to a stout wire rope connected with a running block travelling along the thick steel overhead hawser stretched across the river and made fast to very substantial piles driven deep in the ground. About eight versts further on we had to recross the Katuna, the same kind of ferry being in use, and, following the river over a newly cut road for a couple of versts, we halted for the night and slept on the open road.

This newly-made road cut in the soft earth of the steep bank at a height of 150-ft. above the river was only wide enough for one vehicle and, owing to the big ruts and holes made by heavy traffic, it was particularly dangerous in places.

We rattled along at a good pace next morning, thanks to the extra measure of corn Vasily served out to the horses and the liberal application of black grease to the wheels and axles. Eight verst^s brought us again to the Katuna, which we crossed a third time, and on the other bank of which Government engineers were at work surveying the country for the proposed railway line to connect with the Trans-Siberian Railway at Novo-Nicolaievsk. The inhabitants of this part of the country regard the project with some apprehension, since most of the men engaged in transport work are convinced that the advent of the railway will throw them out of employment. From Biisk to Kobdo carters take a month to perform the journey under favourable conditions; but it sometimes happens when the rivers are swollen and roads bad, that delays of two and three months occur.

At the present rate of progress and with the engineering difficulties to be surmounted in this mountainous region, it will be some years before Kosh Agatch is connected with Biisk, notwithstanding that the line is already completed as far as the latter town. Nevertheless carters were keenly discussing the subject in view of the activities of the Government surveyors, and regarding the matter more in the light of a national disaster than a means of opening up and developing the vast mineral and agricultural resources of the country.

Bee-keeping is among the occupations followed by the inhabitants of the Altai. We stopped at several farms and endeavoured to obtain some honey; but they had that day delivered their supplies to one of the many co-operative produce companies operating throughout this region.

We had a very stiff climb over the Tchikataman. A steep zigzag road, with many sharp bends scarcely permitting of a vehicle turning, leads over this height. Progress

was slow and laboured and somewhat dangerous in descending on the other side, owing to the loose nature of the road and its many narrow turns.

We picked up the telegraph line on the other side of the pass and followed the road through the Kharbarovka district to Angudai, a flourishing village boasting two churches and a post and telegraph office. A halt was made at the telegraph office while Vasily sent a message to his father to prepare him for his arrival. A knot of people collected outside taking a great interest in Wong, whose queue called forth many comments and excited the wonder and admiration of the women folk. I thought we were going to remain at Angudai for the night, but Vasily said we should have to go some distance beyond the village, where he could turn the horses loose to graze. This meant another night in the open and a cold one, owing to the heavy dew.

From this stage of the journey there were noticeable signs of population in the frequency of the clusters of log cabins and Kalmuck *yurts*. We passed in turn Tukta and Tenga, small villages, each possessing a church about the size of a suburban villa, and soon entered an extensive forest about thirty versts from Shabalinoi. The road was very bad and the horses came down several times; but Vasily stuck to his task for he had resolved to reach home that night, and I was equally anxious that he should, after his glowing description of the place.

It was about ten o'clock when we drove into the sleeping hamlet; the rattle of the vehicles over the rough road set the dogs barking and caused some of the inhabitants to look out of their windows as Vasily shouted to his tired animals, urging them along in true Russian style.

We stopped outside his father's house, which was in darkness, for they had not expected him to arrive before the morning and had gone to bed. A head was thrust out of the window and a voice shouted, "Is that you, Vasily?"

Welcome home, my son," and soon the other members of the family were awake shouting words of welcome.

In spite of the lateness of the hour for the good people of Shabalinoi, his wife and children and all his relations were brought out of their beds; for had not Vasily returned after six months' absence. There was feasting, music and dancing, and the singing of folk songs until the dawn when, worn out with their exertions and frequent drinking to each other's health and the safe return of Vasily, those who could not walk to their beds sank down on the floor and slept there.

It was well past mid-day before anyone was astir, and this in the person of Vasily, who had donned a new red blouse, velveteen bags and top boots, and was ready for another carousal. I began to fear that another night of such festivities would incapacitate his brother and delay our getting away. Neighbours called during the day and soon the effects of the previous night were forgotten in the convivial reunion, at which *vodka* flowed like water and drugged their senses. By midnight the house was resounding with the stentorian breathing of the revellers, some of whom, through sheer physical inability, were unable to find their way to their own homes and lay on the floor.

After the revels of thirty-six hours I fully expected to encounter some opposition to the idea of starting for Biisk at the appointed time; but to my surprise, on looking out next morning, I saw Vasily's brother Alexis busying himself with the necessary preparations. The other members of the family were also going about their occupations as if the festivities of the last two nights were but common occurrences in the daily round. There was, however, a very subdued tone observable in their manner, which contrasted strangely with their high spirits of the previous day, while the frequent visits to the well for cold water betrayed in some measure the burning thirst with which they all seemed to be consumed.

At breakfast Vasily's father, looking like the familiar picture of shock-headed Peter, ventured to point a moral on the ill-effects of too much merry-making, but no one appeared to have any interest in morals at that inopportune time, judging by the silence that followed.

The whole family—a very numerous one—turned out to see us off. As we drove out of the compound the little wife of Alexis ran up to shout a final injunction to her husband to keep clear of the attractions of Biisk and not to forget the material for the children's frocks.

Poor Alexis! If his appearance was any indication of his feelings he was indeed in a sorry state. His bloodshot eyes glowed like balls of fire under his bushy brows, while his hair, lank and wet from the frequent immersion of his head in cold water, accentuated his wild appearance. Yet we left Shabalinoi in the approved style, sending the horses along at a lively pace to the repeated cracking of the whip. The vehicles jolted and jarred along the road, sometimes swaying from side to side and all but overturning in the deep ruts.

Several times we halted to make tea and enable Alexis to duck his head in the cold water of a stream to cool it. Passing in turn two picturesquely situated hamlets called Myucta and Tcherga we soon arrived at Sarasa, a village with a very prosperous air and a few well stocked stores. From this village onwards the character of the country began to change. Narrow, well-wooded valleys merged into broad sweeping uplands and extensive plains bounded by low hills almost devoid of wood. We were endeavouring to reach Altaiskoye before sunset, and it was only by enlisting the arguments of the *yemchik*, driving the *toredoika* on which the heavy baggage was placed, that we succeeded, as Alexis wanted to stop about ten versts outside the town. The driver was equally desirous of reaching that place, and as we were two to one, Alexis had to give in.

It was about an hour before sunset when we stopped outside the log cabin of one of Alexis' friends, and while

supper was being prepared I had a look round while it was still light.

Fine wide thoroughfares with substantially built wooden houses, a market place, post, telegraph, church and school, characterized this thriving centre for agricultural produce, which will, no doubt, in course of time, become one of the most important towns in the Altai. At present the produce is transported by cart, a somewhat slow and expensive mode of conveyance, but with the extension of the proposed railway from Biisk this advantage will disappear and the trade relations and natural resources of the surrounding districts will be extended and developed.

I was rather tired of *sakari* and meant to get some bread if any could be obtained, and on inquiring in the market place, where the stores were on the point of closing, I was directed to the only baker in the place, who was a kind of jack-of-all-trades and added to his income by baking three times a week for a small clientele. It happened to be a baking day (for which fact I was very thankful) and after explaining the object of my visit, he invited me to take tea and offered to put me up for the night, if I desired.

After a chat and a smoke I came away with a couple of substantial loaves of bread and found my henchman Wong outside, the object of a curious but admiring crowd. He was becoming so accustomed to the attention of the peasants, especially the womenfolk, who were for ever admiring his fine queue, that he began to take it as a matter of course.

We made an early start next morning, reaching the village of Katuna after a drive of an hour and a half. From this village onwards three roads lead to Biisk, two of which are about the same length whereas the third, lying midway between them and of only comparatively recent construction, shortens the journey by some fifteen versts. The shortest route, however, is not always passable in bad weather, but at the time of our arrival we ascertained that it was open for light traffic, and consequently decided to travel by it. It

lay across meadowland, very boggy in places, which necessitated driving with caution, but Alexis did not seem to mind bogs or marshes—he simply drove straight on following the wheel-worn track, deviating occasionally when he thought fit. When we got into difficulties he would apologize for the state of the road, and we had to jump out and lend a hand.

We reached the village of Katunskoye at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. It being Sunday the good people were attired in their best clothes and knots of village lads and maidens were dancing and singing to the familiar strains of the accordion.

Alexis whipped up the horses, as he apparently wanted to make a good impression, and we rattled along scattering the chickens and dogs in all directions. This did not last long, however, as we came to grief at a sharp turning leading to the ferry. Alexis thought we could take it without slowing down, which resulted in the overturning of the *telega*, precipitating me and the many sundry articles of baggage inside, headlong into the road. I found myself mixed up with pots and pans and blankets and saw Alexis a few feet away covered with mud and stunned, but otherwise unhurt.

When he came to his senses he lost no time in anathematizing the stupidity of the people who caused the road to be constructed at such a sharp angle; but he would not admit his culpability.

The villagers came to our assistance and helped to repair the damage done to the shafts, which resulted in a delay of an hour. After this little mishap, which might have been more serious, we proceeded with caution to the river, which we had to cross for the fourth time. There were several other vehicles waiting for the ferry to return and we had to fall in line and take our turn with the rest. It was a very commodious ferry, similar in construction and operated upon the same principle as that on which we first crossed the Katuna, but with the addition of rudely constructed paddle wheels worked by four horses harnessed to the long bars of a kind of capstan.

I counted ten vehicles and twenty horses on the ferry, excluding the four working the paddles. The passage across took about 12 minutes. As we landed on the opposite bank I heard the familiar note of a river steamer's syren and realized that we were not very far from Biisk.

A sharp drive through a fine forest brought us to the outskirts of the town, with its pretty villas and flower gardens, permitting of occasional glimpses of the town itself and the river Biya, upon which it is situated.

It being Sunday, and a holiday, the inhabitants were taking their walks abroad and enjoying the congenial warmth of that July day. As we traversed the broad thoroughfares in the direction of the hotel they cast curious glances at us, and at our destination, a knot of people collected around us, speculating as to where we had come from and making rough guesses at my nationality—the bolder ones putting questions to Alexis, who apparently satisfied their curiosity. Here I discharged Alexis and his colleagues and upon entering the hotel, found my self in touch again with the more familiar forms of modern civilization.

Biisk, like most of the towns in the Siberian Altai, owes much of its prosperity to the dairy produce industry which gives employment to the bulk of its 40,000 inhabitants. Coming to this place from the thinly populated region in which I had been travelling, it seemed to bustle with commercial activity, and I was impressed with that air of importance which it seemingly assumed. It had not long been linked up with the Trans-Siberian Railway at Novo-Nicolaievsk, and the town-folk were anxiously awaiting the announcement of the opening of the line to traffic, as the coming of the railway was regarded as an important step in the development of the country. But Biisk is not the chief town in the Altai, although if you listen to the residents you are apt to form that idea. The administrative seat for the whole of the Altai region is at Barnaul, one day's journey by steamer down the river Ob. Barnaul is the older place and was founded by Demidoff two

centuries ago ; but was not raised to the status of a town until a century later, and it is only during the last few decades that it has attained its present position. Like Biisk, it is an *entrepôt* for produce, besides being the distributing and collecting point for an extensive agricultural district. With the opening of the line to Biisk and its extension in course of time to Kosh Agatch, a vast and little known region, rich in mineral resources, will be opened up for future enterprise. Generally speaking, progress in Siberia has been retarded owing to the delay in providing adequate means of communication. Even in her European provinces, Russia was slow to build railways, and it is not surprising when one considers this feature of the situation, that her possessions in Asia north of Turkestan, have been sadly neglected. For more than three hundred years, the post road was the only link with the civilized world, and it was not until the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway was begun that any real progress in towns east of the Urals was noticeable.

And now my narrative draws to a close, for the remainder of my journey is chiefly concerned with the difficulties I experienced in reaching my destination after the outbreak of war. A five days' trip down the Ob brought me to Novo-Nicolaievsk where I found the routes to Moscow and Petrograd so congested with traffic that I was finally obliged to leave the beaten track and travel through a part of Siberia had not included in my plans. At Novo-Nicolaievsk I had to part company with the faithful and resourceful Wong who, after a series of adventures and long delays, finally reached Peking.

In looking back upon my journey in Mongolia and my experiences among its uncouth, but hospitable and interesting peoples, I feel again all the attraction of that vast and little known country and the free life of the nomad.

APPENDIX.

ASPECT OF TRADE.

In 1910 some wealthy Russian merchants who had commercial relations with Outer Mongolia fitted out an expedition which was led by two professors from the University at Tomsk, M. I. Begoliepoff and M. N. Soboieff.

The object of this expedition was to make a close investigation into the general economic conditions and a thorough enquiry into the causes of the decline of Russia's trade in that part of the country which had relations with Russia long before the Treaty of Nerchensk, 1687.

Prior to the despatch of this expedition, no organized attempt had been made to gauge the possibilities and resources of this vast region; moreover, the records at the Custom Houses on the frontier at Kiachta, Kosh Agatch, Bakhti and Zaisansk, the four chief points through which merchandise passes in and out of Siberia, were found to be incomplete and not wholly reliable.

At the time of the expedition's visit to the various trade marts, the Russian Treaty of 1881 was still in operation. This Treaty provided for the exchange of goods duty free within a zone of 50 versts on either side of the frontier and although it secured to Russian traders very favourable advantages they soon found in the Chinese, who had penetrated into the remotest parts of Outer Mongolia, very keen and competent rivals.

The Manchu Government was desirous of revising this Treaty and abolishing the free trade privileges accorded therein. Notes passed between Russia and China but no decision was reached. In the meantime, the Revolution broke out in China and the Mongols who had suffered under the

tyranny of Manchu rule, seized their opportunity to declare their independence. But in order to secure their position they needed the support of their northern neighbour, and a Mission was sent to Petrograd headed by Prince Hanta Chin Wang, who obtained for the Government at Urga, full recognition as an independent state. Not only did Russia give the Mongols her official support, she also supplied them with munitions and the Mission returned to Urga, highly gratified with the result of the journey to Petrograd. Russia, however, was not slow to recognize the possibilities of this new situation and lost no time in securing all the advantages embodied in the Treaty of 1881 and more besides as witness the Urga Agreement and Protocol signed by the Hutukhtu and the Russian commissioner M. Korostovetz on the 3rd November, 1912, which in addition to settling all the outstanding questions with China to Russia's entire satisfaction, undertakes to render the Mongolian Government any assistance needed to maintain their autonomy.

The conclusion of this Treaty gave Russian trade a new lease of life and when the report of the expedition was published in 1912, in which the causes of Russia's failure to maintain her commercial supremacy were fully discussed, it was generally expected that all the objectionable methods of trading would be abolished and that a new policy would be framed to prevent the recurrence of those faults which in the past had resulted in failure.

The foregoing remarks briefly summarize Russia's position as at the end of 1912; but before passing to a review of the general features of trade as observed in the beginning of 1914, I give below a few statistics taken from the Expedition's report.

CUSTOM HOUSES.

Along the frontier conterminous with Siberia there are only four Custom Houses.

Kiachta, connecting with Verkhne-Udinsk on the Trans-Siberian Railway and Urga, the capital of Outer-Mongolia.

Kosh Agatch on the direct route to Biisk in the Russian Altai and Kobdo in Western Mongolia.

Zaisansk, through which trade flows to and from towns on the Russian Irtysh.

Bakhti on the main route to Sergipol, Chuguchak and Tarbagatai.

In addition to these places trade with Siberia crosses at the following points where there are no Custom Houses.

The River Yenesei and the village of Usinskaya across the Sayansk mountains.

The Tunka road through the Kosogol Basin and connecting with Lake Baikal and Irkutsk.

VALUE OF RUSSIAN EXPORTS TO MONGOLIA.

| | | | | | | | Roubles. |
|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----------|
| 1899 | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 3,117,649 |
| 1900 | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 2,737,715 |
| 1901 | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 2,388,174 |
| 1902 | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 3,929,126 |
| 1903 | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 4,309,291 |
| 1904 | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 3,266,931 |
| 1905 | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 3,641,229 |
| 1906 | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 4,571,175 |
| 1907 | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 4,509,064 |
| 1908 | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 3,715,487 |
| 1909 | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 2,621,029 |

Distributed as follows (values expressed in thousands of Roubles) :—

| | | | Bakhti | Zaisansk | Kosh Agatch | Kiachta |
|------|-----|-----|--------|----------|-------------|---------|
| 1899 | .. | ... | 1,316 | 458 | 369 | 976 |
| 1900 | ... | ... | 1,316 | 454 | 373 | 594 |
| 1901 | ... | ... | 1,431 | 332 | 414 | 212 |
| 1902 | ... | ... | 2,088 | 507 | 578 | 752 |
| 1903 | ... | ... | 2,483 | 561 | 496 | 768 |
| 1904 | ... | ... | 1,784 | 511 | 294 | 677 |
| 1905 | ... | ... | 1,491 | 474 | 437 | 1,239 |
| 1906 | ... | ... | 1,741 | 688 | 550 | 1,592 |
| 1907 | ... | ... | 2,424 | 776 | 563 | 747 |
| 1908 | ... | ... | 1,995 | 801 | 364 | 556 |
| 1909 | ... | ... | 1,347 | 791 | 294 | 189 |

APPENDIX

143

RUSSIAN COTTON TEXTILES (Poods, 36 lbs.).

| Average for | 1899-1901 | 1903 | 1904 | 1905 | 1906 | 1907 | 1908 | 1909 |
|--------------|------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Bakhti | ... 25,236 | 44,392 | 24,029 | 18,495 | 21,639 | 30,065 | 23,728 | 12,969 |
| Zaisansk | ... 8,381 | 9,377 | 8,235 | 7,068 | 8,562 | 11,623 | 10,872 | 9,824 |
| Kosh Agatch. | 3,604 | 6,861 | 1,850 | 3,909 | 4,014 | 4,178 | 2,282 | 1,607 |
| Kiachta | ... 6,845 | 8,886 | 6,260 | 11,797 | 14,863 | 6,988 | 3,331 | 3,015 |
| Totals | ... 44,066 | 69,516 | 40,392 | 41,269 | 49,078 | 52,859 | 40,213 | 27,505 |

METAL WARE AND HARDWARE (Poods).

| Average for | 1899-1901 | 1903 | 1904 | 1905 | 1906 | 1907 | 1908 | 1909 |
|-------------|------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Bakhti | ... 11,763 | 12,219 | 18,366 | 16,117 | 14,853 | 10,787 | 9,504 | 8,744 |
| Zaisansk | ... 525 | 518 | 1,520 | 2,169 | 1,939 | 1,744 | 1,435 | 1,815 |
| Kosh Agatch | 3,783 | 4,672 | 3,132 | 2,851 | 4,025 | 4,566 | 3,172 | 1,756 |
| Totals | ... 16,071 | 17,409 | 23,018 | 21,137 | 20,817 | 17,097 | 14,111 | 12,315 |

SUGAR (Poods).

| Average for | 1899-1902 | 1903 | 1904 | 1905 | 1906 | 1907 | 1908 | 1909 |
|--------------|-----------|--------|--------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Bakhti | ... 3,305 | 8,269 | 6,717 | 3,606 | 13,969 | 13,548 | 17,371 | 10,110 |
| Zaisansk | ... 344 | 54 | 57 | 114 | 185 | 300 | 211 | 194 |
| Kosh Agatch. | 367 | 418 | 332 | 355 | 1,510 | 2,477 | 300 | 711 |
| Kiachta | ... 940 | 13,555 | 10,941 | 2,884 | 4,402 | 8,048 | 15,663 | 12,535 |
| Totals | ... 4,956 | 22,296 | 18,047 | 6,959 | 20,066 | 24,373 | 33,545 | 23,550 |

DRESSED HIDES (Poods).

| | | | 1906 | 1907 | 1908 | 1909 |
|-------------|--------|-----|--------|--------|-------|-------|
| Bakhti | ... .. | .. | 1,183 | 1,296 | 1,048 | 561 |
| Zaisansk | ... .. | ... | 1,172 | 1,947 | 2,068 | 1,721 |
| Kosh Agatch | ... .. | ... | 2,613 | 2,185 | 1,302 | 1,012 |
| Kiachta | ... .. | ... | 3,043 | 6,659 | 5,441 | 280 |
| Totals | ... .. | ... | 35,381 | 12,087 | 9,859 | 3,565 |

FELT (Poods).

| | | 1904 | 1905 | 1906 | 1907 | 1908 | 1909 |
|-------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Bakhti | ... .. | 5,438 | 3,521 | 3,449 | 3,882 | 3,827 | 6,940 |
| Zaisansk | ... .. | 7,933 | 9,371 | 9,931 | 12,688 | 10,397 | 11,201 |
| Kosh Agatch | ... .. | 383 | 348 | 402 | 852 | 728 | 526 |
| Kiachta | ... .. | 4,436 | 3,944 | 1,139 | 1,662 | 1,802 | 1,052 |
| Totals | ... .. | 18,190 | 17,184 | 14,921 | 19,084 | 16,754 | 19,719 |

RUSSIAN IMPORTS FROM MONGOLIA.

WOOL (Poods).

| | 1904 | 1905 | 1906 | 1907 | 1908 | 1909 |
|-----------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Bakhti ... | 97,103 | 107,721 | 107,849 | 100,137 | 81,774 | 105,387 |
| Zaisansk ... | 16,650 | 16,975 | 30,280 | 23,853 | 17,084 | 16,502 |
| Kosh Agatch ... | 40,610 | 137,603 | 111,161 | 133,318 | 122,304 | 108,168 |
| Kiachta ... | 12,858 | 17,374 | 24,695 | 38,794 | 53,070 | 112,334 |
| Totals ... | 267,221 | 269,673 | 273,985 | 296,507 | 272,232 | 342,391 |

VALUE OF RAW AND PARTLY WORKED MATERIALS, ALSO CATTLE.

| | Roubles. | | | | | |
|----------|----------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----------|
| 1903 ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 3,643,432 |
| 1904 ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 4,151,546 |
| 1905 ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 4,266,644 |
| 1906 ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 4,527,111 |
| 1907 ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 5,143,083 |
| 1908 ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 5,678,024 |
| 1909 ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 8,097,487 |

SHEEP AND GOAT SKINS (Poods).

| | 1906 | 1907 | 1908 | 1909 |
|-----------------|--------|--------|---------|---------|
| Bakhti ... | 52,459 | 51,639 | 46,381 | 57,470 |
| Zaisansk ... | 19,360 | 28,358 | 32,077 | 32,129 |
| Kosh Agatch ... | 2,335 | 2,553 | 1,539 | 8,770 |
| Kiachta ... | 3,065 | 13,252 | 23,681 | 33,707 |
| Totals ... | 77,219 | 95,802 | 103,673 | 132,076 |

PELTS (Poods).

| | 1906 | 1907 | 1908 | 1909 |
|-----------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Bakhti } ... | 314 | 225 | 424 | 671 |
| Zaisansk } | | | | |
| Kosh Agatch ... | 5,899 | 9,237 | 13,172 | 8,629 |
| Kiachta ... | 8,341 | 4,224 | 10,890 | 24,791 |
| Totals ... | 14,554 | 13,686 | 24,486 | 34,091 |

Although the figures quoted above are very incomplete and only refer to a few of the articles imported and exported, they will serve to indicate approximately the extent of Russia's commercial relations with Mongolia up to the end of 1909.

TRADE ROUTES.

The principal trade routes through Outer Mongolia are between Kiachta, Urga and Uliassutai through the fertile valleys of the Orkhon and Selenga, taking *en route* the small trading centres of Sain Shabi and Saithurae, which are situated in about the same latitude as that of the old capital Karakorum, at a distance of approximately forty-five miles to the west of the ancient site. There is also a well-beaten track from Kiachta to Uliassutai direct. It runs through the valley of the Orkhon and joins the Urga-Uliassutai route about five days by camel east of Uliassutai.

From Uliassutai there is a comparatively good road to Kosogol and on to Irkutsk, but it is not so frequently travelled as that to Urga and Kiachta.

Communication between Uliassutai and Kobdo is only at infrequent intervals, owing chiefly to the nature of the country between those two places. Caravans travel at considerable risk and it is not unusual for a camel train to arrive, having lost half of the animals owing to the barren nature of the soil. The Mongol Government maintains small relay stations at intervals of twenty-five to thirty miles for the use of government officials and travellers. These relay stations are usually composed of two or three *yurts* with camels and ponies in charge of a small official and they can be moved about from place to place where the pasturage is good and fairly abundant.

From Kobdo a well-worn track runs to Kosh Agatch, Shabalinoi, and Biisk. This is now the most frequented of all the routes radiating from Kobdo. There is also the route to Zaisansk and Bakhti, and a few years ago trade relations were maintained between Kosh Agatch and Biisk in the Russian Altai. Kobdo will soon be linked up with Europe by telegraph, the line was completed as far as Ulegei on the river Kobdo, some 100 miles from Kosh Agatch, in July 1914.

COMMUNICATIONS.

There are post and telegraph offices in Urga controlled by the Russians. There is also a Chinese Post Office and mails are sent to China regularly by mounted couriers via the Gobi. There is no direct telegraphic communication between Urga, Uliassutai and Kobdo, but there are Russian Post Offices attached to the Consulates at each of those places and also at Sain Shabi. Mails are made up at regular intervals and despatched by mounted couriers or camel trains. Mails from Uliassutai are usually sent to Russia and the Far East via Urga and Kiachta; while mail matter from Kobdo is forwarded via Kucheng in Chinese Turkestan and Kobdo, but that road is seldom used now.

In addition to the above named routes there are direct roads across the Gobi to Kweihuacheng, Kalgan and Dolonor. The most frequently travelled is that from Kalgan to Urga.

TRANSPORT.

The usual means of transport is the camel caravan. Rates vary according to local conditions such as the supply of and demand for camels.

From Urga to Kalgan rates varying from \$15 to \$30 per beast may be obtained. Urga to Kiachta \$10 to \$15. Urga to Uliassutai \$20 to \$30. Kalgan/Kweihuacheng to Uliassutai \$20 to \$35. Kiachta to Uliassutai \$20/\$35, while from \$50 to \$80 per camel may be demanded for a journey from Urga to Kobdo.

There is also the ox cart, a very slow means of transport, very largely employed by Chinese. The rates are not so high as for camel transport; but the time taken in making a journey is twice as long as that usually taken by camels.

FOREIGN IMPORTS.

The principal foreign imports are: Brick tea, cotton goods, manufactured goods for clothing, metal and metal ware knives, enamel ware, hardware, dressed leather, and felt.

NATIVE PRODUCE. EXPORTS.

Horses, cattle, sheep, wool, skins, hair, fat, camel hair, furs of many kinds, including fox, marmot and sable, are the principal native exports.

GENERAL FEATURES OF TRADE.

One of the great drawbacks to the development of trade is the absence of banks and banking facilities. A few years ago, the Russo-Asiatic Bank opened branches in Urga and at Uliassutai and the T'a Ching Bank also had a branch at Mai Mai Cheng in Urga; but these branches have since been closed and there seems to be no prospect at present, of any fresh attempt to re-establish banking facilities in the capital. In consequence of this there is comparatively little money in circulation and it is only in places such as Urga, Uliassutai and Kobdo, where there are Russian Consulates, Consulate guards and stores, that Russian paper money is used.

As regards payment for native produce and imported goods, barter is the general method of completing these transactions, and in all cases the native is a victim of the trader. The Mongol has no knowledge of commercial values, and being obliged to obtain long terms of credit, he becomes an easy prey to the unscrupulous methods of trading, such as commonly obtain in the market. In giving terms of credit to the natives, merchants charge extortionate rates of interest and exact the full measure of their bargain. Long credits are necessary owing to the fact that the improvident Mongol is only able to make payment in certain seasons of the year such, for instance, as at the end of the shearing season beginning of July when the summer is well advanced and the sheep are in good condition. No trader would think of accepting animals in payment in spring, owing to their poor condition as a result of hard work and scarcity of food.

Trading under these conditions is attended by many risks having regard to the nomadic habits of the Mongols who are

continually shifting their tents to where the pasturage is good and abundant, for it not infrequently happens that traders are unable to trace their clients during their peregrinations.

To minimize the risk of loss and non-fulfilment of contracts, merchants send their men out to the various encampments well in advance of the recognized season for the delivery of produce to report upon conditions and see to the despatch of purchases made or taken in exchange for goods supplied. This naturally entails considerable work and expense and necessitates living with the Mongols, acquiring a good practical knowledge of their language and of their manners and customs. In this respect both the Russians and Chinese usually found in this country are particularly well equipped owing to the many years of trading experience they have had in this part of Asia.

RUSSIAN AND CHINESE POSITIONS REVIEWED.

The political events of 1911 and 1912 resulting in the formation of a Republic in China and the independence of Outer Mongolia enabled Russia to secure a very substantial *quid pro quo* for the material support she gave the Mongol princes in their successful struggle against the Chinese Government, as evidenced by the advantageous Urga Agreement and Protocol which grants to Russian subjects trading rights and privileges not enjoyed by any other Power.

The Agreement and Protocol were signed on the 3rd November 1912, and secures to Russian subjects the right to travel in all parts of Mongolia, conduct business, establish factories and enter into commercial transactions with all individuals and companies irrespective of nationality. Moreover, Russian subjects are permitted to import free of duty all products and manufactures of all countries and conduct free trade. The origin of the goods has to be declared and in the event of a false declaration being made, the penalty is the forfeiture of these rights and privileges. Russian banks have the right to establish branches anywhere in Mongolia

and conduct banking business with companies and individuals. Trade with the natives may be done on a cash or credit basis; but the Mongolian Government undertakes no responsibility for credit transactions. In addition to the above-mentioned privileges Russian subjects have the right to buy or lease land throughout Mongolia, build stores, houses, warehouses and lease land for agricultural purposes. They are also free to make arrangements with the Mongolian Government for mining, forestry and fishing concessions. The navigation of all Mongolian rivers flowing into Russian territory is open to Russian subjects with Russian vessels. The Russian Government undertakes to assist in the conservation of these rivers and Russian subjects are granted sites on the river frontage as stopping places for vessels and for the erection of warehouses.

Russian subjects may transport goods and cattle over any of the roads and rivers in Mongolia, and they may also build bridges and ferries at their own expense and levy toll from the people. When travelling with flocks and herds Russian subjects are at liberty to reserve grazing grounds for a period of three months without payment after which time the Mongolian Government have the right to make a charge. All other rights and privileges enjoyed by Russian subjects along the frontier, prior to the ratification of this agreement, such as hunting, fishing, and grass cutting, are also conceded. There are regulations governing the conduct of business with Mongols or Chinese, relating to immovable property and the method of procedure in case of dispute. Such cases are to be brought before the permanent mixed courts established in those places where there are Russian Consulates. This practically completes all the principal points in the Protocol relating to the rights of Russian subjects. There are, however, two points worthy of notice. Firstly, that no monopoly shall be established in any class of business or manufactures, and secondly, that if the Mongolian Government finds it necessary to enter into a separate treaty with

any other foreign power, this Treaty may not be infringed or altered in any way without first consulting the Russian Government and obtaining its consent. Other nations shall not be granted any more rights in Mongolia than those conceded to Russian subjects.

The conclusion of this agreement, following closely upon the declaration of independence and the absence of Chinese competition in consequence of the precipitate exodus of Chinese merchants who survived the events of 1912, were all in Russia's favour, and it was anticipated that with the advantages secured, Russian trade would be revived and expanded. The right class of merchant did not, however, respond to the liberal invitation of the Government, with the result that among the fresh arrivals in Urga under the new *régime* there were some who were ready to exploit the ignorance of the native and consequently prejudice Russian commercial interests. However, with the absence of competition from Chinese merchants, trade with Siberia and Russia soon began to show signs of improvement and goods of Russian origin imported via Siberia were in evidence in all the marts in Outer Mongolia.

With the gradual settling down of the country under the altered political conditions, some of the Chinese who had fled during 1912 returned to Urga, Sain Shabi and Uliassutai and commercial relations with Chinese markets were gradually restored, and competition for the import and export trade was resumed.

In contrast to Russian methods, the Chinese prior to 1912 were well organized and, moreover, they came to an agreement among themselves regarding values and prices of articles bartered for native produce. Their frugal habits and adaptability to local conditions placed them in a strong position to compete against Russian traders, for in 1910 they were, according to the report of the Russian Expedition, scattered widely over the country and were to be found near lamaseries and encampments and travelling from place to place with

suitable articles for sale or exchange. With the roads open to North China they were able to buy from all the important markets of the world and find a ready outlet for native produce. Most, if not all, of the Chinese houses trading in Outer Mongolia were branches of important Chinese houses in Kalgan, Peking, Kweihuacheng and Tientsin. They were well organized as regards transport as may be seen by the camel hongs in Kalgan and Kweihuacheng existing to-day; but at that time doing a considerable traffic.

Although the Chinese differed very little from their Russian competitors in regard to their transactions with the natives, the intimate knowledge they had of the market coupled with their enterprise made them very powerful competitors.

Notwithstanding all the rights and privileges enjoyed by Russian subjects, competition from Chinese sources was in 1914 beginning to make an impression upon Russian trade, and merchants were known to complain about the renewed activity of Chinese competition. The causes of this are not difficult to find, since Russian merchants trading in Mongolia make no attempt to conceal the methods and practices they employ in their transactions with the natives. They are obviously in Mongolia to make as much money as possible in the shortest possible time, and as a result of this, the methods they employ are questionable. The colossal ignorance of the native regarding values and affairs outside his own country offers an easy field for unscrupulous exploitation, and store-keepers are not slow in taking full advantage of the situation.

They foist upon the native goods of inferior quality, give short weight and short measure, and exact double and treble the value in payment. These practices not only prejudice Russian commercial interests to a very considerable extent, but also go a long way towards retarding the development of the trade between the two countries. The preferential treatment accorded under the Urga agreement coupled with the

geographical advantages of situation, place Russia in a strong position to develop the resources of the country : but the want of capital, the lack of enterprise and initiative, the bad reputation of traders and the absence of interest on the part of influential and wealthy Russian houses, are the chief causes of the stagnant condition of Russian trade.

Russia has many thousands of square miles of virgin and partly cultivated soil in Siberia, and although the Government has offered many inducements to settlers during the last decade, progress has been slow. The present war and its consequent financial burden will not only retard the development of her own agricultural and natural resources, but preclude the initiation of new enterprise in regions beyond her own frontiers.

There is plenty of scope for enterprise in Outer Mongolia, but the peculiar features of trading presuppose a careful study of local conditions. In a market where money is the rare exception and not the rule, and articles of clothing and old and new saddlery, are taken in stores in exchange for articles the native wants, and where the natural produce of the country is bartered for imported foreign goods, a merchant contemplating an attack upon the trade of this singular market is faced with many serious problems.

In the course of time the Chinese will probably recapture the trade, and although this will only mean ordinary merchandise business, the development of the rich mineral wealth of the country will be open to those who are able to obtain concessions from the Mongolian Government.

Since the foregoing notes were written, the whole situation has changed to such an extent that Russian trade in Outer Mongolia is now non-existent. This is not difficult to understand when one considers the political events in Russia during the last two years, for politics and commerce are closely interwoven in the relations between Russia and her Tartar neighbour.

With the changing fortunes in Russia from the overthrow of the Romanoff Dynasty through the succeeding phases of the revolution to the later development of Bolshevism, the Mongols have shown signs of apprehension for the continued independence of their political status. Frequently of late, the foreign and Chinese press have published reports from various sources, one of which hinted that Outer and Inner Mongolia were about to unite with the object of forming an independent State. Another rumour which has been widely circulated suggested that negotiations were in progress for the transfer of Russia's rights in Outer Mongolia to another power. To what extent these rumours are true remains to be seen. One thing is certain, and that is, the collapse of Russia has placed the Urga Government in a quandary, for although the Mongols had begun in 1914 to feel the dominating influence of Russia, and to repent of their precipitate action in appealing to her for help to maintain their independence, all the powerful supports upon which their autonomy was sustained, have since been swept away by the strong tide of Bolshevism.

It was not intended to discuss this aspect of the situation, but to outline briefly the possibilities of this undeveloped country in which political and commercial interests are once more centred. However, in the light of recent events one cannot abstain from making conjectures as to what will be the ultimate fate of Mongolia.

INDEX

| | | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Amban, Manchu | 9, 33, 57 | Hutukh'tu | 10 |
| Argun R. | 14 | Hailar | 14 |
| Amur R. | 14 | Habitations (Mongol) | 37 |
| Altai (Mongolian) | 102, 115, 117 | Horsemanship | 39, 40 |
| Argol (fuel) | 107 | Hoitamir R. | 89 |
| Angulak | 131 | Hanongol R. | 92, 96 |
| Altai (Siberian) | 126 | Hospitality (Russian) | 119 |
| Altaiskoye | 135 | | |
| | | Inns, Siberia | 16, 21 |
| Batu | 5 | Ili Valley | 127 |
| Bogdo Khan | 10 | | |
| Buriats | 15 | Juchens | 3 |
| Bogdinol (Mtn) | 32 | | |
| Bogdingol R. | 103, 109, 114 | Kalgan | 1, 11, 12 |
| (or Sapkhin) | | Kabul | 4 |
| Bointugol | 117, 120 | Kansu Chinese | 5 |
| Biisk | 119, 123, 128, 138 | Karakorum | 6, 76, 79 |
| Byelukha | 131 | Khubla Khan | 6, 8 |
| Bee-keeping | 132 | Khalkhas | 7, 8 |
| Biya R. | 138 | Kinghan Mts. | 14 |
| | | Kiachta | 16, 23, 101 |
| Chu Yuan Chang | 6 | Khan Kuchum | 24 |
| Chakhars | 7 | Krasnoyarsk | 24 |
| Chita | 15 | Kansu | 43, 118 |
| Clans (Mongol) | 34, 35 | Kumban | 43 |
| Camels | 45 | Kobdo | 59, 61 75, 117, 119 |
| Camels, buying | 59, 60, 61 | Kumiss, preparation of | 111 |
| Consulates (Russian) | 33, 104, 117 | Karanor L. | 115 |
| Chinese Turkestan | 118 | Kharaussunor L. | 115 |
| Chu R. | 126 | Kobdo R. | 116 |
| | | Kosh Agatch | 120, 123, 124, 125 |
| Dress, Mongol | 37 | Kalmuck | 126 |
| Dogs | 42, 88 | Khoshots | 127 |
| Dalai Wang | 49 | Katuna R. | 131 |
| Dust Storm | 65 | Kharbarovka, district of | 133 |
| Dzungars | 127 | Katuna, village of | 136 |
| Durbots | 127 | | |
| Dzungaria | 127 | Lamaism | 7, 8, 9 |
| | | Language | 38, 39 |
| Etiquette | 50 | Labrang | 43 |
| Erdentso | 80 | Lhasa | 43 |
| Egindava | 99 | | |
| Eleuths | 127 | Manchus | 3, 8 |
| | | Meng'ku | 4 |
| Funerals | 4 | Manchu Government | 9 |
| Ferry, water reed | 115 | Mongols | 14 |
| | | Missionaries | 20, 55 |
| Great Wall | 1 | Mai Mai Cheng (Kiahta) | 24 |
| Ghengiz Khan | 4, 33, 51 | Mai Mai Cheng (Urga) | 33, 34, 42 |
| Gobi Desert | 7, 11, 12, 17, 43 | Malunga, Mongol bandit | 25 |
| | | Manhatai pass | 29 |

| | |
|----------------------------|-------------|
| Morality (Mongol) | 39 |
| Marriage ceremony | 41 |
| Maitreya, feast of | 52, 53 |
| Marmots | 69, 70, 102 |
| Myucta | 135 |

| | |
|--------------------------|----------|
| Naiman Turks | 5 |
| Novo-Nicolaievsk | 132, 139 |

| | |
|---------------------------|--------|
| Ogdai | 5 |
| Ordos | 7 |
| Outer Mongolia | 10, 34 |
| Omsk | 24 |
| Obos | 46 |
| Oderic, Friar | 76 |
| Orkhon R. . . . | 77, 79 |
| Oginor L. . . . | 79 |
| Otogontenger (Mtn). . . . | 102 |
| Ob R. . . . | 139 |

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|
| Peking | 1 |
| Posting Stations, Siberia | 18 |
| Post road | 18 |
| Pilgrimages | 42, 43, 88, 102 |
| Pony (Mongol) | 45 |
| Prison (Urga) | 55, 57 |
| Prisoners | 55, 57 |
| Prairie Fires | 59 |
| Polo, Marco | 6, 51, 76 |

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--------|
| Rubruquis, William de | 6, 76 |
| Russian Government | 9 |
| Rest Houses | 27 |
| Racing. . . . | 40, 41 |
| Religious Characteristics | 46, 47 |
| Ruins, Zagan Baishin | 78, 79 |

| | |
|----------------------------------|----------------|
| Scythians | 3 |
| Santo | 9, 57 |
| Sheydu Pass | 14 |
| Siberia | 14 |
| Sungari R. . . . | 14 |
| Selenga R. . . . | 16 |
| Selinginsk | 19, 20 |
| Stroganoff, The Brothers | 23 |
| Sibir | |
| Savr, burning of | 53 |
| San Geen | 67 |
| Sagannor L. . . . | 71 |
| Sainshabi | 73, 82, 84, 85 |

| | |
|----------------------|----------|
| Sheep buying | 82, 83 |
| Saithurae | 90 |
| Shabalinoi | 123, 133 |

| | |
|---------------------------------|----------------|
| Tartary | 1 |
| Turkish Onigurs | 3, 38 |
| Tungus | 3 |
| Temujin | 5 |
| Tangut | 5 |
| Turkestan | 5 |
| Trans-Siberian Railway | 11 |
| Troitskasarsvsk | 19, 21, 23 |
| Tomsk | 24 |
| Telega (for travelling) | 26, 27, 29 |
| Tola R. . . . | 31, 59, 68, 72 |
| Temples | 32, 54 |
| Tibet | 43, 46 |
| Transport, means of | 43, 45 |
| Tchollottergol R. . . . | 98 |
| Tsakin R. . . . | 101 |
| Tea—how prepared | 107 |
| Telgol | 115 |
| Tunguts | 127 |
| Tchibit | 130 |
| Tchikataman | 132 |
| Tukta | 133 |
| Tenga | 133 |
| Tcherga | 135 |

| | |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| Ussukpal | 7 |
| Urga Agreement | 10, 148 |
| Urga | 11, 16, 31, 63 |
| Uda R. . . . | 16 |
| Uj Kiachta | 18, 21 |
| Uliassutai | 59, 75, 82, 103, 105 |
| Ulegei | 121 |

| | |
|------------------------|--------------------|
| Verkhne-Udinsk | 12, 15, 16, 17, 27 |
|------------------------|--------------------|

| | |
|-----------------------|---------|
| Women, Mongol | 38 |
| Wu Tai Shan | 43 |
| Water holes | 74, 100 |
| Wolves | 72 |

| | |
|------------------|----------------|
| Yessugai | 4 |
| Yermak | 23 |
| Yakutsk | 24 |
| Yero R. . . . | 27 |
| Yurts | 32, 33, 37, 38 |
| Yak | 121 |



Route Map: OLD TARTAR TRAILS.

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